

ANSWERS TO THE VIDEO, LOUISIANA LEGENDS: ERNEST GAINES

1. This is not a real autobiography. The characters are fiction, but developed based on the lives real people led.
2. New Roads, Louisiana (about twenty miles northwest of Baton Rouge)
3. Gaines worked for both black and white sharecroppers from the age of eight.
4. He had nine brothers and three sisters.
5. A large family and working from an early age gave him a sense of family responsibility.
6. Gaines grew up during the early forties.
7. He did not question being treated differently than whites because he had never known anything else.

ANSWERS TO THE GROUP WORK:**Group 1*****“I heard the voices...of my Louisiana people”******A Conversation with Ernest Gaines*****Leaving the South**

- A. Gaines left the south in order to get a good education in San Francisco.
- B. There were a lot of people from Louisiana in San Francisco. Also, during the writing of *The Autobiography of Miss Jane Pittman*, his grandmother was staying with him and cooked Louisiana food all the time.
- C. He didn't leave Louisiana in his heart because he left a place and people he loved. Gaines visits frequently. He can sit at his desk and still see the scenes of his childhood.

The Camera and the Mind's Eye:

- A. Gaines takes pictures of lines of houses, bayous, rivers, roads, and railroad tracks. The pictures may represent his leaving the South and a way of life that is also leaving.
- B. He can never get a good picture of the railroad tracks.
- C. Gaines says that still pictures don't show what a person can see with the "mind's eye". "The mind's eye can travel down the road like a movie camera."

Group 2***“I heard the voices...of my Louisiana people”******A Conversation with Ernest Gaines*****Writing about the Unexpressed**

- A. Gaines left Louisiana at the age of fifteen.
- B. The "unexpressed" are stories of the rural south about black people that are similar to Gaines' family.
- C. He wanted to write about how people like his family grew up in the South because he could not find a description of this in any of the books he read. He wanted to tell their story.
- D. With each book he wrote, he found that he had not gotten everything he had hoped for into the book. Gaines began by looking into the 1940's, then 1930's, and searching for experiences that his family could have had in the past.

The Saga of Miss Jane

- A. The purpose of the forward of the book is to prepare the reader for Miss Jane's language and to show that the story could not be told without help.
- B. Gaines' research included reading history by whites and blacks, slave narratives, biographies, rural blues, sermons of ministers, and listening to the old people.
- C. Gaines appears to have a lot of respect for his aunt and grandmother. I think he could feel close to this illiterate old woman who managed to survive so much.

Group 3***American Slavery: A Composite Autobiography***

On this website are two sample interviews, Ann Ulrich Evans and Tom Windham. Basically have the students highlight the parts of the interview that answer the questions and any other very interesting parts to read to the class. Be sure that they bring in the part about Tom Windham's daughter and two sisters that live in Liberia. This will connect Group 8's section on the development of Liberia as a place to send freed slaves in the Back to Africa Movement.

Group 4***"I heard the voices...of my Louisiana people"******A Conversation with Ernest Gaines*****History as a Backdrop**

- A. Gaines feels that history and truth are two different things.
- B. He was writing to show things that could have happened to Miss Jane on personal level during this time period. Gaines used local, state, and national events as a backdrop to her life.
- C. Albert Cluveau, the Cajun assassin, is the real character in this book.

Whose Story Was It, Anyway?

- A. He tried to write the story from a group conversation about Miss Jane after she was dead.
- B. Gaines believes that our greatest books have been written in first person. He learned how to do it from reading Tugenev's *Father and Sons*, Joyce's *Dubliners* or *The Portrait of the Artist as a Young Man*, and Sherwood Anderson's *Winesburg Ohio*. He was able to take the Southern oral tradition and put it on paper.

Group 5***"I heard the voices...of my Louisiana people"******A Conversation with Ernest Gaines*****The Art of Storytelling**

- A. Gaines tries to write what he hears and write as truly and simply as he can for all readers.
- B. Americans are the best first person storytellers according to Gaines

Writers Black and White.

- A. The novel and the English language are creations of white people.
- B. He brings jazz, folk music, blues, spirituals, and the tradition of storytelling into his work. These things give it distinction.

Group 6***"I heard the voices...of my Louisiana people"******A Conversation with Ernest Gaines*****Searching for the Edges**

- A. Gaines will go to extremes such as a very subservient man contrasted to a to a hard domineering man. He might contrast a cowardly person with one that would take risks. He would use complete darkness against complete light and extreme cold versus extreme heat.
- B. Nature is as much a character in the book as the people. Nature has an effect on the storyline and characters in the story. Gaines would use heat to intensify violence.

The Road to My Father's House

- A. Gaines tries to keep the events simple. He only wrapped the story around two major events in the book *My Father's House*.
- B. As an author, he does not compare a character to a hero, but may have the other characters in the story do it.

The Rules of the Racial Game

- A. Blacks and whites can be friends when they are young, but there comes a time that they stay with their own kind. Gaines felt that as long as society is going to have blacks and whites, some form of mixing will eventually occur.

Group 7**The African Journey**

The students should only do short summaries of each hero. The following are examples of things that might be contained in the summaries.

Booker T. Washington (1856-1915)

He was the most important black leader of that time. Washington founded a vocational school for black people in Tuskegee, Alabama. Tuskegee Normal and Industrial Institute was started in an old abandoned church and taught mechanics, carpentry, farming and teaching. He believed that black people should get a practical skills education rather than a college education. They should build a strong economic base and begin to own property in order to be accepted.

George Washington Carver (1864?-1943)

He was a black American scientist that became famous for his research with peanuts. He made over 300 products from face powder, to milk substitute, to soap with the humble peanut. He joined the Tuskegee Institute and worked for soil conservation and crop production. Carver worked hard toward promoting black people and improving race relations.

Ida Bell Wells-Barnett (1862-1931)

She was an American journalist and reformer. During the late 1800's and early 1900's, she exposed lynchings that took place without a trial and worked toward laws that would outlaw this practice. Mrs. Wells-Barnett and her husband helped found the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People (NAACP).

W.E.B. Dubois (1868-1963)

He was a leader of the African American protest against racial discrimination. Dubois was the first to suggest Pan Africanism in which all people of African descent have interests in common and should work together. He was the first African American to receive a Ph.D. from Harvard. Dubois helped to found the NAACP and worked for them. He was also a professor at Atlanta University. He believed that black people should get college educations and lead the fight against discrimination. Dubois later became a communist, thinking that this was the solution to black problems. He moved to Ghana.

Group 8**American Colonization Society**

- A. In 1821, land in Africa was bought with \$100,000 appropriated by Congress in order to found a colony for blacks illegally brought into America.
- B. The abolitionists opposed the creation of Liberia because it would strengthen slavery by removing the freed blacks. The blacks were not eager to leave what had now become their native land.
- C. After more than 11,000 blacks were sent back, the movement slowed. From 1840 and 1860 was the last time of the immigration to Africa. From 1865 to 1912, the American Colonization Society worked as a trustee for Liberia.
- D. Miss Jane would not have wanted to go to Africa. She knew no one there and was unfamiliar with the culture. She just wanted to go to Ohio.

Post civil war reconstruction and confederate immigration to Brazil

- A. The Southern economy was virtually ruined and the people went at the request of Emperor Dom Pedro II. He was interested in immigrants with experience in farming and cotton planting.
- B. The soil and climate of this part of Brazil, within Sao Paulo State, was similar to that of the South. Pecans, peaches, corn, and cotton did very well there. They also brought their culture.
- C. Some Americans returned to the states, but many stayed. They slowly assimilated into the Brazilian culture. Many would be considered black or mulatto if visiting in America.
- D. They still remember their southern heritage today. A group that settled in a community on the Amazon River celebrates the Junino Festival (a cultural celebration throughout Brazil during the last half of June) by dressing as southerners and square dancing to music that includes accordions and banjos. Sons of Confederate Veterans was formed in 1994 by descendents of the original immigrants. They celebrate with Southern-fried chicken, cornbread, blue grass music, and confederate flags are in abundance.