

# ENG 1141

## Creative Writing



### *Objectives*

Discuss the elements of context

Analyze Gaines' fiction

No word is absolutely wrong or dirty or insulting. It all depends upon context and intention.

- Janet Jackson

Do you agree or disagree? Explain why.



# Context

- What do we mean when we talk about “context” in literature?
  - Look at the image. What does the man behind the camera see? What will people who can only see what the camera shows think?
- Consider the chapter from *A Lesson Before Dying*.
  - What are some of the possible issues?
  - The novel came out in 1993. Think back (or do some research on that time period): What had happened around that time? How would that have affected how people interacted with the novel?
  - What is happening now that may color how we view *A Lesson Before Dying*?



# Context in Poetry:

## “A Song on the End of the World,” by Czeslaw Milosz

On the day the world ends  
A bee circles a clover,  
A fisherman mends a glimmering net.  
Happy porpoises jump in the sea,  
By the rainspout young sparrows are playing  
And the snake is gold-skinned as it should always be.

On the day the world ends  
Women walk through the fields under their umbrellas,  
A drunkard grows sleepy at the edge of a lawn,  
Vegetable peddlers shout in the street  
And a yellow-sailed boat comes nearer the island,  
The voice of a violin lasts in the air  
And leads into a starry night.

And those who expected lightning and thunder  
Are disappointed.  
And those who expected signs and archangels' trumps  
Do not believe it is happening now.  
As long as the sun and the moon are above,  
As long as the bumblebee visits a rose,  
As long as rosy infants are born  
No one believes it is happening now.

Only a white-haired old man, who would be a prophet  
Yet is not a prophet, for he's much too busy,  
Repeats while he binds his tomatoes:  
There will be no other end of the world,  
There will be no other end of the world.

*Warsaw, 1944*

- **The final line of the poem, “Warsaw, 1944” puts the poem in context. What was going on in Warsaw, Poland, in 1944?**
- **What do you think this poem is about with the final line?**
- **What would change with the poem if the final line was gone?**

# A Deeper Look @ Gaines' Work

Think about the context of the chapter in *A Lesson Before Dying*. Can you guess (if you don't know already) what time period/place this novel is set?

Now, go online and read a summary of the novel. Was your guess correct?

What do you know about the time period this novel is set?

Authors often want to set context by *showing*, not *telling*. How did Gaines "show" the context of this novel in the first chapter?

Think about the POV in this chapter. The narrator uses 1<sup>st</sup> person, yet he describes moments he did not actually witness. How does this show the context of what he's sharing?

Think about the POVs in "The First Day," "The Wife's Story," and the stories written by your peers. How does the POV shape the context in each one?



# Homework

- **Revise** short story for evaluation, due **4/1** (use the format on p. 7 of the syllabus)
- **Write** a NEW story in any POV you like, but focus on the setting and/or context, due **4/1**
- **Journal Assignment 6:** What is your current home setting like? Is it noisy and crowded, or silent and empty, or something in between? What's the context? Describe it!

