

# Comparison of chopin and hurston's novels

[Literature](#), [Novel](#)



In choosing to compare and contrast the works *The Awakening* by Kate Chopin and *Their Eyes Were Watching God* by Zora Neale Hurston, both female characters struggle to find what they desire in life throughout both novels, but the experiences of racism are quite different for these two characters. Kate Chopin published *The Awakening* during Victorian Era of the nineteenth century in America, when gender roles followed a strict set of guidelines. Although when Zora Neale Hurston produced *Their Eyes Were Watching God* the roles expected by men and women were not as strict, women were expected to keep their place in the home and obey their husbands.

The issues of gender and race were especially apparent in the Southern region of the United States, where both of these stories take place.

The main characters in both novels challenge the gender roles set for women during this time in American history. First, focusing on the character Edna Pontellier from the novel *The Awakening* by Kate Chopin, and the way in which she breaks from the normal expectations of a housewife. At the beginning of the novel The Pontellier family seem to be the traditional happy aristocratic family living in New Orleans, Louisiana. During the nineteenth century women were expected to stay home and care for their children and husband. It is apparent that Edna Pontellier is not content to just be a housewife, but longs to pursuit her own interests. In Katherine Godinr's synopsis of the novel she describes Ednar's husband feeling that she is not like the other mothers around them. While her family is vacationing in Grand Isle, Louisiana she meets Robert Lebrun, a young and handsome man who she ultimately falls in love with. Before the relationship can grow into an

<https://assignbuster.com/comparison-of-chopin-and-hurstons-novels/>

affair, Robert leaves for a business trip to Mexico, which leaves Edna terribly saddened. When her family returns to their home in New Orleans, Edna decides to follow her own interests, and begins focusing on artwork. She no longer is fulfilling her obligations in their home, and socially. She ultimately realizes that she will not be happy in her marriage, and she cannot have a relationship with Robert. She walks onto the beach and into the water where her and Robert met, and commits suicide. Edna never gets to experience the romance filled relationship she longed for.

In comparison the character Janie Crawford in *Their Eyes Were Watching God* by Zora Neale Hurston also challenges the gender roles set for women during the twentieth century. This story is also set in the Southern region of the United States, and portrays the roles in which women of this region were expected to conduct themselves. The story follows Janie, an independent and strong willed woman, while she is searching for her true love through a series of marriages. Her first husband is chosen for Janie by her grandmother, but this marriage does not last long as he threatens to kill her and she runs away with the man who would become her second husband, Joe Starks. While Joe is handsome and charming, he expects Janie to follow the definition of her role as a woman and wife. This marriage does not satisfy Janie, as she is not fond of the ideals and norms of being a housewife that Joe demands of her. After a series of events, Joe succumbs to an illness and dies while Janie is left alone. After Joe's death, Janie finally finds the man she has longed for, and falls in love with a man named Tea Cake. They have a seemingly happy marriage, aside from the jealousy they each feel. After a hurricane hits the Florida Everglades, where they call home, a dog with

rabies bites Tea Cake while he is trying to protect Janie. He contracts rabies from the mad dog, and tries to shoot Janie in a state of madness. Janie kills him in self-defense is put on trial for murder, although she is acquitted and set free. Janie does find the relationship she was looking for, even though it ended tragically.

Both characters Edna and Janie fail to follow the rigid rules expected of women in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries of America. Women in the Southern region of the United States were expected to be housewives that cared and tended to their husbands and children. They were not to disobey or speak against their husbands throughout this time in American society. During this time in American history, women can gain power only through marriage, preferably to a rich and/or powerful man (Boyd).

As both stories take place in the South, there are major differences in which the two women experience the society around them. Although the stories take place in different centuries, the issue of race is still a major topic in American history. Edna and her husband, Leonce, have a typical marriage set in the New Orleans Creole society. The family experiences no racism through their status of wealth and power of the aristocratic society. They live among the socially elite, which have every necessity and desire available to them without conflict.

In contrast, Janie is an African-American woman living in the Southern region of the United States, during the Jim Crow era of the twentieth century. Janie also experiences racism within her own black community because she is moderately white. The author, Zora Neale Hurston, describes the racism

experienced from the white society, but she also points out there was racism within the black community as well. Janier's character looks down on those in her all-black town of Eatonville who have a darker skin tone than her, feeling she is superior to them being only partially black. Hurston also uses Janier's three marriages to convey the ways in which African-Americans were seeking equality during the Jim Crow era.

In Janier's first marriage to Logan Killicks, she is treated like child who is expected to obey without question. The author uses this to show those in the African-American community who believed that they should just obey the laws set by white society, and not question the reasons or fight for change. The second marriage of Janie and Joe Starks, conveys that Janie is allowed to have a little more freedom, but is still expected to follow the rigid rules of female roles. Through this Hurston is conveying the message that some in the black community are willing to take some added freedoms from white society, but they are still held back by the segregation of public places. The final relationship between Janie and Tea Cake is of a more mutual understanding, but there are still tendencies of jealousy from both parties. This can also be said of the relationship between those in the white society who are willing to accept the African-Americans, but still have hidden racial emotions and tendencies.

In conclusion, the two novels *The Awakening* by Kate Chopin and *Their Eyes Were Watching God* by Zora Neale Hurston have comparative and contrasting issues regarding life in America during their respective time periods. In both stories, the main characters struggle with conforming to the

rigid gender roles expected of them during their times in American history. The contrasting difference between these two women are the ways in which they experienced racism in the Southern region of the United States.