

Their eyes were watching god by zora neale hurston

[Literature](#), [American Literature](#)



About the Author Although Zora Neale Hurston (1891- 1960) passed away impoverished and was buried in an unmarked grave in a racially segregated cemetery, she had an exceptional career as a novelist. She was likewise a pioneer in recording African American culture. Hurston matured in Eatonville, Florida, a totally included African American town, and studied at Howard University. In 1925, she moved to New York City, where she became an influential talent of the Harlem Renaissance, the blossoming of African American literature and art.

While attending Barnard College, she satisfied the well-known anthropologist Franz Boaz, who persuaded her to study the folklore of African Americans in the South. Her very first collection of African American folk tales, *Mules and Men*, was released in 1935.

Her second collection, *Tell My Horse*, released in 1938, likewise contained descriptions of African American cultural beliefs and routines brought from Africa. Hurston achieved important and popular success with her novels *Jonah's Gourd* (1934), *Their Eyes Were Enjoying God*(1937), and *Moses, Man of the Mountain* (1939).

She also composed a prizewinning autobiography, *Dust Tracks on a Roadway* (1942), as well as narratives and plays. When Hurston passed away in 1960, all her works were out of print. In the 1970s, African American author Alice Walker restored interest in Hurston, helping to restore her reputation.

Background *Their Eyes Were Viewing God* is set in Florida during the 1930s. Although the story is imaginary, the town of Eatonville, developed and governed by African Americans, is genuine. At the end of the Civil War,

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blacks settled near the town of Maitland. In 1882, the black business person Joseph C. Clarke purchased a big system of land, subdivided it, and sold lots to black families.

In 1887, blacks incorporated the area as an independent town called Eatonville, Hurston's childhood home. Quick Guide As you read *Their Eyes Were Watching God*, keep these literary elements in mind:

- **Figurative language** is writing or speech not meant to be interpreted literally. Similes, metaphors, and personification are types of figurative language. A simile compares two things, using the words *like* or *as*. In a metaphor, one thing is spoken of as though it were something else. In personification, a nonhuman subject is given human qualities. Note how Hurston uses figurative language to enrich the novel.
- **Dialect** is language spoken by people in a particular region or by a particular group. Pronunciation, vocabulary, and sentence structure are affected by dialect. To become accustomed to the dialect in this novel, read the dialogue—the characters' words—aloud. Pronounce the words as they are spelled.
- **A symbol** is a person, place, or thing that stands for something beyond its own meaning. Note the symbolism of the pear tree in this novel.
- **A conflict** is a struggle between opposing forces.

The characters in this novel meet external conflicts, in which they struggle with outside forces, such as another character, a force of nature, or society. They also face internal conflicts, or conflicts within themselves. As you read, notice especially Janie's internal conflicts.

- **The context** of a work is the historical and cultural setting in which the action takes place. *Their Eyes Were Watching God* is set in the social and cultural world of African

Americans in the South during the 1930s. •Character motivation is the reason for a character's behavior. Consider what motivates the main character, Janie, in this novel. Their Eyes Were Watching God Reading Guide © Pearson Education, Inc. 1 Their Eyes Were Watching God Reading Guide Vocabulary 1. dilated(dì» làt id)adj. opened, enlarged, or extended (page 7) 2. consolation(kon sß là» §ßn)n. comfort (page 7) 3. desecrating(de» sß kràt« i ç)v. deliberately damaging something sacred (page 14) 4. ether(è» •ßr)n. the heavens (page 25) 5. incredulous(in krej» ø lßs)adj. disbelieving (page 37) 6. boisterously(b;is» tßr ßs lè)adv. in a loud and noisy manner (page 39) 7. jurisdiction(jør« is dik» §ßn) n. the range of authority or control (page 42) 8. invested(in vest» ßd)v. covered with (page 43) 9. temerity(tß mer» ß tè)n. foolhardiness; reckless disregard for danger (page 50) 10. prominence(pram» ß nßns)n. the quality of being widely known (page 53) 11. indulge(in dulj»)v. to gratify a desire (page 53) 12. hyperbole(hì ptr» bß lè) n. figure of speech that uses exaggeration (page 63) 13. hearse(htrs)n. vehicle for transporting a dead body during a funeral (page 88) 14. insinuations(in sin yø à» §ßnz)n. acts introduced gradually and by subtle means (page 88) 15. dissolution(dis ß lø» §ßn)n. extinction of life; disintegration (page 112) 16. excruciating(eks krø» §è àt« iç)adj. extremely painful (page 108) 17. desolation(des« ß là» §ßn)n. the state of being deserted or unfit for habitation (page 167) 18. perseverance(ptr sß vè» ßns)n. following a course of action or belief without giving up (page 167) 19. supplication(sup li kà» §ßn) n. the act of asking humbly or earnestly (page

178) 20. drone(dròn) v. to make a low humming sound (page 188) Chapters 1-3 (pages 1-25)

Discussion Questions 1. What criticisms of Janie do the women sitting on the porch mention? Why are they so critical of her? 2. What common words and phrases are represented by these examples of dialect: Ah kin, mah, sho nuff, dat? 3. What does Janie mean when she says, " Mah tongue is in mah friend's mouf"? 4. What does the blossoming pear tree in Chapter 2 symbolize? 5. How does Nanny's experience as a young woman affect her hopes for Janie? Writing Activity Write a paragraph describing what Janie learns from her marriage to Logan Killicks. Chapters 4-5 (pages 26-50)

Discussion Questions 1. List one example each of metaphor, simile, and personification in these chapters. 2. What is Janie's internal conflict regarding Jody? 3. Why does Janie decide to run away with Jody? 4. How does Jody realize his dreams of becoming a " big voice"? 5. How does Jody treat Janie? Writing Activity Write a diary entry as if you were Janie. Describe your new life with Jody. Chapter 6 (pages 51-75)

Discussion Questions 1. Which details of the novel so far explain the cultural and historical context? 2. What are the people's attitude toward the mule? 3. Why does Janie feel sympathy for the mule? 4. How does Janie's attitude toward Jody change? 5. Why do the men criticize Mrs. Tony? Why does Janie defend her? Writing Activity Write a paragraph explaining whether or not you think Janie is better off with Jody than she was with Logan. Chapters 7-10 (pages 76-99) Discussion Questions 1. What does the author mean when she says, " She got nothing from Jody except what money could buy, and she

was giving away what she didn't value"? Their Eyes Were Watching God Reading Guide 2 Their Eyes Were Watching God Reading Guide 2. How is Jody affected by Janie's insult to his manhood? 3. What is Janie's motivation for confronting Jody on his deathbed? Do you agree with her actions? Why or why not? 4. Why does Janie hate her grandmother? 5. How does Janie react to Tea Cake? What can you predict about their future relationship? Writing Activity Briefly contrast the way Tea Cake treats Janie to the way Jody treats her.

Chapters 11-13 (pages 100-128) Discussion Questions 1. What internal conflict does Janie have over Tea Cake? 2. What does the image of Tea Cake as "a pear tree blossom in the spring" symbolize? 3. What does Janie mean when she says, "Ah wants tuh utilize mahself all over" (p. 112)? 4. What does Janie mean when she says, "He done taught me de maiden language all over"? 5. What events make Janie finally come to fully trust and believe in Tea Cake? Writing Activity Write a paragraph describing what Janie finds attractive about Tea Cake. Why does she fall in love with him? Chapters 14-17 (pages 129-153) Discussion Questions 1. How would you describe the cultural context of these chapters? 2. How do other people of the community regard Tea Cake and Janie? 3. What is Mrs. Turner's attitude regarding African American people? How is her attitude different from Janie's? 4. Why do both men and women feel envious when Tea Cake hits Janie? 5. Why do you think Tea Cake intervenes in the fight at Mrs. Turner's? Writing Activity Write a paragraph explaining how Mrs. Turner's attitude toward her race reflects the cultural and historical context.

Chapter 18 (pages 154–167) Discussion Questions 1. What are signs that a serious hurricane is approaching? Why do Tea Cake and Janie ignore the warnings? 2. How is Lake Okechobee personified as the hurricane approaches? 3. What does Janie mean by the statement, “ If you kin see de light at daybreak, you don’t keer if you die at dusk. It’s so many people never seen de light at all” (p. 159)? 4. What type of figurative language is expressed by “ Their eyes were watching God”? What does this statement mean? Writing Activity Write a paragraph describing what happened during the hurricane. Chapters 19–20 (pages 168–193) Discussion Questions 1. How does the description of burying the dead reflect the cultural context? 2. How do Janie and Tea Cake make fun of white people’s prejudice against them? 3. Why does the author describe Tea Cake’s death as “ the meanest moment of eternity” (p. 184)? 4. Why do Janie’s black friends turn against her at her trial? 5. What figure of speech does Janie use to describe love (p. 191)? Writing Activity Write a short narrative from the point of view of another character to explain what happens to Tea Cake.

Pulling It All Together Writing Write an essay explaining how Janie changes by the end of the novel. What has she learned about herself? About love?

Dramatic Reading Choose a passage of about one to two pages that includes dialogue. Perform an oral reading for the class. Be sure to pronounce the dialect as it is written. When reading dialogue, use appropriate tone and gestures. Their Eyes Were Watching God Reading Guide 3 Their Eyes Were Watching God by Zora Neale Hurston Sensitive Issues The novel includes language and attitudes toward African Americans that are considered

offensive today. Remind students that this novel was published in the 1930s and concerns experiences of African Americans during that time. Chapters 1-3

1. They criticize her clothing, her relationship with a young man, and her manners; they seem to be envious of her.
2. Ah kin—I can; mah—my; sho nuff—sure enough; dat—that
3. “My tongue is in my friend’s mouth,” which means that her friend will speak for her and tell her story.
4. Possible responses: It represents her dreams, possibilities, the promise of love, adulthood.
5. Nanny had a child by her slave master and was mistreated by the master’s wife; she wanted Janie to be safe and have a husband to protect her.

Writing Activity She learns that love does not automatically come with marriage; she realizes she could never be satisfied with Logan and that she wants more out of life. Chapters 4-5

1. Possible responses: simile: “morning air like a new dress”; metaphor: “He had always wanted to be a big voice”; personification: “The sun from ambush was threatening the world with red daggers.”
2. She is attracted to Jody and to the prospect of new horizons, but she is afraid that he might use her and then leave.
3. She realizes that life with Logan means a narrow existence with little romance or excitement; Jody offers a way out and a chance at new horizons.
4. He works to establish a new town by buying up land and organizing people to begin developing it.
5. He treats her like a lady and does not allow her to participate in important decisions and activities.

Writing Activity Students’ entries may suggest that Janie is disappointed with her new life; that she was expecting more participation in life instead of being just a fixture.

Chapter 6 1. 2. 3. 4. 5. the details about the farm; attitudes about white people; dialect, storytelling, and humorous exchanges They make jokes about him; they think it's funny to tease him; they have no concern for him. Possible response: Like the mule, she too has been treated like an object for many years. She realizes that he was never the romantic figure she had originally thought; she no longer loves him. They believe she is making a fool of her husband; they believe she is deliberately spiteful toward her husband. Janie believes the men are arrogant and that they think they are better than women. Writing Activity Students may suggest that she is better off with Jody because she has more financial security and that she sees more of the world. Others may say that while Logan wanted Janie to work hard, Jody tries to break her spirit, and so she was better off with Logan.

Chapters 7-10 1. She receives no love or respect from Jody; she gives him her obedience and her work, but she does not give him her heart. 2. He is humiliated; he strikes her when she insults him; he worries that people are making fun of him. 3. Possible responses: She wants to let him know what he has done to her before it's too late; she may want to hurt him. Some students may agree with her, saying that he deserves to hear the truth; others may say that it is cruel to torment a dying person. 4. She feels her grandmother "sold" her and tried to stifle her dreams for the sake of material security. 5. She is attracted to him and a little afraid of him, worried about what his motives might be. They probably will have a happy relationship. Writing Activity Student paragraphs should show that Tea Cake

treats her with respect and enjoys her company; Jody treats her like an object or a possession to be dominated.

Chapters 11-13 1. 2. 3. She likes him and is attracted to him, but she cannot believe that he is being honest with her; she is concerned about the difference in their ages; she is worried that he might just want to use her and take her money. He symbolizes her dreams for romance and love, new life, and a life that is fulfilling. She wants to grow and exercise all of her abilities and possibilities. 4 He has renewed her dreams and makes her feel young again. 5. He uses her money but replaces it by gambling and returning to her. Writing Activity Student responses may reflect that he treats her with respect; he seems to enjoy her company; he is funny and lively. Chapters 14-17 1. The people are migrant workers who come to the Everglades seasonally; they are mostly poor and black, with little education, but they enjoy life and one another's company. 2. They enjoy his good humor and her good looks; they look up to them. 3. She does not like black people; she thinks that the lighter the skin the better; she looks down on blacks. Janie accepts her people and enjoys their company. 4. The men believe it is a sign of his dominance and possession of her; the women believe it is a sign of his love for her. 5. Possible responses: He knows that by pretending to stop the fight, it will actually make the fight worse.

Writing Activity Student paragraphs should show that, at the time, blacks suffered discrimination and segregation and were not treated as equal to whites, especially in the South. Many blacks tried to look more like white people in order to gain acceptance Chapter 18 1. the Indians leaving; the

crows flying; the warning of Tea Cake's friends. They are making good money; Tea Cake believes that the weather will clear. 2. The lake is personified as a monster rolling in its bed. 3. She has "seen the light" with her life with Tea Cake and believes she is better off than many other people who have never had the chance at real love. 4. A metaphor. Possible meanings: they were depending on God, or a higher power, to protect them, or they were watching and waiting to see what the higher power, nature, or fate had in store for them.

Writing Activity Student paragraphs should reflect details of the hurricane as described in the text. Chapters 19-20 1. It shows white men forcing black men to work, segregation even in death, and the lesser value placed on blacks. 2. They joke about how whites think that the black people they know are okay but the ones they do not know are bad and that whites think that they already know all the "good" blacks. 3. It was the cruelest moment in Janie's life when she had to kill the man who had helped her blossom and whom she loved. 4. They claim that she was trying to poison Tea Cake. 5. She uses a simile, comparing love to the sea. Writing Activity The narrative should include the main events of Tea Cake's sickness and death. Pulling It All Together Writing Student essays should reflect Janie's growth and how she becomes aware of her own needs and feelings and learns the meaning of love. Dramatic Reading Readings should accurately reflect the dialect and be performed with appropriate voice inflections and gestures.

Answers to Test Their Eyes Were Watching God by Zora Neale Hurston 2. c A. Thinking About Their Eyes Were Watching God 1. c 3. d 8. a 9. c 10. b 4. b 5.

b 6. b 7. b B. Recognizing Literary Elements and Techniques 11. dialect 12. figurative language 13. conflict 14. context 15. symbol C. Essay Questions 16. EasyStudents should give details about each man. For example, Logan Killicks was hard working and willing to provide for Janie, but he lacked imagination and an adventurous spirit. He would have stifled Janie. She married him at the insistence of her grandmother, who believed that she would be safe and cared for in the marriage. 17. AverageStudents may suggest that Janie achieved her dreams of “ far horizons” and true love. They may use examples of her leaving Logan Killicks; of her resisting Jody’s attempts to dominate her; and, finally, her love for Tea Cake.

Others may point out that she lived with Jody for many years, that she lost Tea Cake, and that she returned to Eatonville as a seemingly broken woman. 18. ChallengingStudents who argue that she should have portrayed the sufferings of blacks may discuss the social conditions of the time and use the examples of Mrs. Turner’s obvious prejudice and the incident in which Tea Cake was pressed into service in burying flood victims. Students who argue in support of Hurston may use examples such as Joe Stark’s organizing a township, the humorous stories that the characters tell one another, and Janie’s sense of dignity