

Vernacular dialect in
their eyes were
watching god



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Vernacular Dialect in Their Eyes Were Watching God In the novel *Their Eyes Were Watching God* by Zora Neale Hurston, the spoken words of the characters are often simple and rough. Hurston uses vernacular dialect in order to preserve the culture of southern blacks in the early twentieth century. The author's use of dialect in the novel demonstrates the difference between Genie's relationship with Jody and Genie's relationship with Tea Cake. When Jeanie is married to Jody, few conversations between the two of them are described using dialogue. Instead, the narrator simply explains Genie's life with Jody and their interactions.

When Jeanie is with Tea Cake, the author chooses to explain their relationship through the use of dialogue. Most of the time Jeanie spends with Tea Cake is shown through the conversations they have with one another. This demonstrates the connection and love between Tea Cake and Jeanie and the lack thereof in Genie's relationship with Jody. The language in the novel also serves to demonstrate the value Jeanie places upon truth in language. Throughout the novel, the narrator speaks condescendingly about those who sit on their porches and gossip. She views gossip as speech without substance, and gossip is portrayed in a active light.

The language itself is not as important as the sincerity behind the words. For the most part, in the novel, the language is most powerful when there is truth behind it. The author's use of speech patterns allows the reader to relate to the characters in the novel. The reader can really get the feeling of the speech because reading it is just like listening to it. Throughout the novel, Hurston's use of folkloric imagery within the dialogue evokes the

southern black culture. She uses phrases like “ porch sitters”, “ walking drum tune”, and “ a lost ball in De high grass.

Storytelling or “ lying” was a major part of this culture, and a major part of the novel. The men in Detonative sit on their porches “ playing the dozen” and telling lies. Jeanie is forbidden by Jody to do either, and is therefore denied participation in an important part of southern black culture. When Jeanie meets Tea Cake, she is finally able to participate in the storytelling itself, and the novel becomes almost an entire act of storytelling. The novel also explores the ways in which women and men use language differently. Men are portrayed in the novel as dominate in conversations.