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Advanced Placement in
English Literature and Composition

Teaching Unit
Individual Learning Packet

*Their Eyes Were
Watching God*

by Zora Neale Hurston

Written by Rebecca Challman

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Their Eyes Were Watching God

Objectives

By the end of this unit, the student will be able to:

1. investigate the apparent use of myth and folklore in the novel.
2. reveal and understand recurring symbols and motifs in the novel.
3. explain the narrative technique of frame narration.
4. identify and expound upon the literary elements that define Hurston's style.
5. analyze the central and related conflicts in the novel.
6. compare and contrast the formal voice of the narrator with the informal voices of the characters.
7. identify and discuss the main idea and the underlying ideas of the novel.
8. Explain how Hurston's use of idiomatic discourse lends meaning to the text.
9. reveal and discuss parallels between Hurston's life and that of her protagonist, Janie Crawford.
10. analyze the tone of individual passages of the text.
11. write about the author's use of language as it relates to theme, characterization, and story development.
12. discuss Hurston's use of irony as it relates to individual characters and as it relates to Janie's quest for happiness and self-fulfillment.
13. respond to writing prompts similar to those that will appear on the Advanced Placement English Literature and Composition Exam.
14. respond to multiple choice questions similar to those that will appear on the Advanced Placement English Literature and Composition Exam.
15. offer a close reading of *Their Eyes Were Watching God* and support all assertions and interpretations with direct evidence from the text, authoritative critical knowledge of the genre, or authoritative criticism of the novel.

Lecture Notes

Zora Neale Hurston: From Disappearing Dust Tracks to a Literary Legacy

I. Daughter of Eatonville

Although Zora Neale Hurston claimed to have been born in 1901 in Eatonville, Florida, records reveal she was born on January 7, 1891, in her parent's hometown of Notasulga, Alabama. She was the fifth of eight children born to John Hurston, a mulatto sharecropper and carpenter, and Lucy Ann Potts, a schoolteacher and daughter of a well-to-do landowner. Lucy's parents did not approve of John Hurston, and John had no more job prospects in Notasulga, so he soon moved the family to Eatonville, the first and only incorporated all-black town in America. Here he served as both Baptist minister and mayor, and his family thrived. The historic town of Eatonville serves as the setting for Hurston's most celebrated work *Their Eyes Were Watching God*.

By her own account, *Dust Tracks on a Road* (1942), Hurston enjoyed a happy, healthy childhood in this unique southern community where whites did not interfere. She did not worry about racial prejudice and persecution, but rather spent her days eating fresh food from her family's garden and neighboring farms, reading books, and playing with her siblings and children from the community. She tried to linger in Joe Clarke's general store listening and learning from the colorful local characters. In fact, Clarke (renamed Stark) and his store became the cornerstone of her community in *Their Eyes Were Watching God*.

Though her father seemed disappointed in his second daughter's willfulness, her mother favored Zora and called her "Mama's child." Her mother provided the children with structure, discipline, and inspiration. She told them to jump at the sun; even if they would never reach it, they would at least get their feet off the ground. Her mother worried because Zora's feet were always wandering in search of the horizon, but she remained within the safe confines of Eatonville. Zora also searched for the horizon in books. She read the Bible, her mother's medical book, and any other books she could find. In 1901, young Zora so impressed two white visitors with her ability to read aloud that they gave her books of fairy tales, Greek and Roman myths, Norse legends, and works by Rudyard Kipling and Robert Louis Stevenson.

Hurston's mother died in 1904 when Zora was thirteen years old. Her funeral would be the last time all the Hurston children would gather. Within the year, her father remarried and dispersed Hurston and her siblings to schools and the homes of relatives. Zora joined her sister Sarah at Florida Baptist Academy in Jacksonville until her father stopped paying the bill. Administrators put fourteen-year-old Zora to work in exchange for finishing out the year. At year's end, her father sent a letter telling school administrators that they could adopt his daughter. Instead, they paid her train fare home. Back home, Zora could not bear to see her twenty-year-old stepmother sleeping on her mother's featherbed. She wrested it from her and left. For the next five years, she moved from place to place trying to support herself. When she was twenty, her father invited her back home. Her stay there ended a month later when her anger toward her stepmother erupted in physical violence. In 1911, Zora wandered away from Eatonville. She spent five years just trying to survive.

Finally, her oldest brother Robert, a medical student, sent for her to help his wife take care of their three children. In exchange, he offered her the promise of returning to school herself. She took care of her brother's children in Tennessee until she realized she would never get a chance to finish school if she remained with him.

Thus, at the age of twenty-four, Zora became a personal assistant of sorts to an opera singer with a traveling Gilbert and Sullivan troupe. Of course, the young blonde soprano thought Zora was still a teenager. Zora said nothing to correct her. She enjoyed the real-life education she was getting, tried to save money, and read as much as she could. Eighteen months later, the singer quit the company to get married. In Baltimore, she and Hurston warmly parted ways. Zora began supporting herself by waiting tables.

In 1917, at the age of twenty-six, Hurston gave in to desperation. She had been waiting tables and trying to start a business with her sister Sarah. However, she knew she could not support herself and fulfill her desire to explore far horizons unless she completed her education. Hence, she lied about her age in order to enroll in high school at the Morgan Academy high school. A year later her father died when a train crashed into his car. He was fifty-seven.

That same year, Hurston relocated to Washington, D.C., hoping to attend Howard University. She earned her high school diploma from Howard Academy in May of 1919 and entered the university as an English major that fall. It took Hurston four years to obtain her Associates Degree from Howard, which she considered the apex of black education. She supported herself by working as a manicurist (a skill she picked up while with the opera company) at a barbershop.

She studied under the tutelage of writer Alain Locke, among others. It was here that she met and fell in love with jazz musician Herbert Sheen. She also published her first short story *John Redding Goes to Sea* in Howard's literary magazine, *Stylus*. As a result, Charles Johnson, the founder of *Opportunity Magazine* in New York, requested more work from Hurston. Later, when Hurston dropped out of Howard University because of illness and financial problems, Johnson convinced her to move to New York.

In 1925, she moved to New York City. She studied anthropology on a scholarship as Barnard College's only African-American student. Her mentor at Barnard, and the father of anthropology, Dr. Franz Boaz (who also taught Margaret Mead), helped Hurston to research her own cultural roots and the folklore of Eatonville. Meanwhile, two of the stories she had submitted to Johnson's magazine, *Black Death* and *Spunk*, won awards. She joined forces with Langston Hughes and others to publish a magazine of the arts called *Fire!!* Ironically, the one issue they succeeded in publishing was poorly distributed, and an apartment house fire destroyed what remained in boxes.

In 1928, Hurston married Sheen, who had moved to New York years earlier. Hurston, however, refused to sacrifice any aspect of her demanding writing career, so the couple divorced amicably in 1931.

II. The Harlem Renaissance

When Hurston moved to New York City, the Harlem Renaissance was already flourishing. The “New Negro movement,” as some called it, began just after the end of World War I (1914-1918) and did not end until after the Great Depression. It sprang from the great northern migration of African-Americans looking for a life free from discrimination and servitude. Black writers, painters, and musicians, found what they were seeking in Harlem. In the small ghetto in northern Manhattan, Hurston joined an amazing assortment of artists assembled in ancient brownstones lining broad streets. Hurston’s soon-to-be close friends, poets Langston Hughes and Countee Cullen, associated with musicians like Cab Calloway and Duke Ellington. The neighborhood gathered at rent parties and nightclubs where Hurston’s folktales and Eatonville stories often highlighted the evening.

The work produced by these artists of Harlem forced America to take them seriously. Many influential blacks of the period such as W.E.B. Du Bois, editor of the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People’s (NAACP) magazine *The Crisis*, subscribed to the theory that a small percentage of gifted blacks would elevate the masses by using art to promote racial pride. Hurston, on the other hand, believed in art for art’s sake. Having grown up in an all-black town, she had a strong sense of self largely untainted by the white majority’s prejudice. Thus, she favored telling the universal human story. Nevertheless, she did not publish her best work until the Harlem Renaissance was over. She did, however, form a commitment to bring some of the positive aspects of black life in the South from the page to the stage.

III. Her Best Work

In 1932, the young and handsome Percy Punter landed a role in Hurston’s stage production of *The Great Day*. Hurston and Punter began dating two years later. He probably had no idea she was forty-four; he was twenty-five. Passion and jealousy alternately fueled their relationship, which she referred to as the love affair of her life. They never married.

Hurston admitted that her love for Percy Punter inspired *Their Eyes Were Watching God*. She wrote it in seven weeks, while doing anthropological research in Haiti. Readers who have gleaned what they can of Hurston’s history cannot help but see other parallels between her life and that of her protagonist Janie Mae Crawford. Hurston resembled Janie in age and appearance at the time she wrote the novel. Janie’s second husband becomes mayor of Eatonville, as Hurston’s father had done. Janie longs to be able to sit on the store’s front porch and enjoy her community. As a little girl, Hurston had longed to do the same. And so on. Of course, the novel documents Janie’s search for spiritual fulfillment, her desire for inner peace. That search often leads Janie to sacrifice bits of herself. Hurston, on the other hand, cherished and guarded her independence. She did what she had to do to survive, but she did not compromise her belief in herself.

IV. Narrative Structure

Their Eyes Were Watching God is a frame narrative, a story within a story. The omniscient third-person sympathetic narrator opens the novel with vivid descriptions of beautiful forty-something Janie Mae Crawford returning to the Eatonville, Florida home she left two years earlier. Janie herself takes the narrative reins in the first and last chapters to begin and end her story as she tells it to her best friend Pheoby Watson. The plot unfolds in a series of flashbacks woven together within this framework.

Hurston's narrative strategy allows for the most sympathetic of narrative voices. The narrator, though anonymous, reveals this sympathy through tone and the occasional subtle adoption of Janie's manner of speaking. While Hurston uses dialogue to reveal information about the other characters, the narrator relays Janie's thoughts and attitudes directly to the reader. Thus, most of the time, the reader knows exactly what motivates Janie.

V. Hurston's Harshest Critics

Lippincott published Hurston's *piece de resistance*, *Their Eyes Were Watching God*, on September 16, 1937. While it received favorable warm reviews from *The New York Times* and the *New York Herald Tribune*, her second novel (her first was *Jonah's Gourd Vine* in 1934) met with harsh criticism from the black writers and critics of the day. Her loving and careful attempts to preserve what was unique about African-Americans and their communities (dialect, folktales, spirituality, etc.) offended them. A young, and then Communist, Richard Wright, of *New Masses*, criticized it as a novel carrying "no theme, no message, and no thought." Apparently, Wright's eyes were watching for social protest and thus, he dismissed Hurston's masterpiece as frivolous. Hurston's onetime Howard University professor Alain Locke similarly criticized *Their Eyes...*, saying it was not serious fiction.

VI. After Words

Zora Neale Hurston published four novels, two books of folklore, and a memoir-like autobiography over her thirty-year career. She died penniless on January 28, 1960, after suffering a stroke at the age of sixty-nine. Her grave in Fort Pierce, Florida, remained unmarked until 1973, when author Alice Walker paid for a stone, which reads, "Zora Neale Hurston: A Genius of the South."

Questions for Research and Discussion

1. What effect does Hurston's third-person omniscient narrator have on the novel as a whole?
2. Contrast the predominantly formal, or high, diction of the narrator with the informal, or low, diction of the characters.
3. Describe Janie's relationship with each of her three husbands as it relates to her quest for her truest self.
4. Support or refute the statement that none of the characters in the novel mean to hurt Janie.
5. Examine and discuss the multifaceted relationship between language and power in the novel.
6. How does the specific setting of Eatonville contribute to the development of the novel's plot?
7. What literary elements define Hurston's style?
8. Define and characterize the genre of *Their Eyes Were Watching God*.
9. What is the significance of the title of the novel?
10. How does Hurston's use of irony lend meaning to the narrative?
11. Give examples of symbolism that inform the central theme of the novel.
12. In what ways does the narrator appear sympathetic toward the people and events in the novel?
13. Interpret the following statement using incidents from the story: "Two things everybody's got tuh do fuh theyselves. They got tuh go tuh God, and they got tuh find out about livin'fuh theyselves." (p. 192)
14. Identify and describe the major conflicts in the novel. How is each resolved?

PRACTICE FREE RESPONSE QUESTION 1

Read the passage from Chapter 16, page 145 that begins, “Once having set up her idols and built altars to them...” and ends, “Oh, for an army, terrible with banners *and swords!*” Then write a well-organized essay in which you analyze the central metaphor and explain what is being revealed about Mrs. Turner’s character.

Avoid plot summary.

PRACTICE FREE RESPONSE QUESTION 2

Read the passage from Chapter 19, page 184, that begins, “‘Tea Cake, put down dat gun and go back tuh bed!’ Janie yelled at him as the gun wavered weakly in his hand,” and ends, “Then the grief of outer darkness descended.” Write a well-organized essay in which you explore how this episode serves as the climax of both the external plot and Janie’s spiritual quest.

Do not merely summarize the plot.

PRACTICE FREE RESPONSE QUESTION 3

The passage in Chapter 19, pages 187-188, beginning, “Then the strange white man that was going to talk for her got up there,” and ending, “But she sat on in that trial chair until the lawyer told her she could come down” differs from the rest of the chapter in that Hurston does not allow the reader to hear Janie testify directly. Write a well-organized essay in which you examine Hurston’s narrative technique in this passage and postulate a reason for the author’s silencing her main character.

Do not merely summarize the plot.

PRACTICE FREE RESPONSE QUESTION 4

Authors generally use stylistic elements to convey their personal ideas about a novel's subject matter or characters. Write a well-organized essay in which you examine how Hurston's use of dialect in *Their Eyes Were Watching God* illustrates her attitudes toward her characters and their situations.

PRACTICE FREE RESPONSE QUESTION 5

In order to qualify as a symbol, an element must consistently point beyond itself toward a greater idea. Select a symbol from the novel and write an essay in which you justify its use by detailing its relationship to the characters, the setting, or the plot. Do not merely offer a catalogue list of symbols and their meanings.

PRACTICE FREE RESPONSE QUESTION 6

In many novels and plays, a tension is created between a character's outward conformity and his or her inner struggle to achieve a sense of individuality. Write a well-organized essay in which you detail how Janie's struggle lends meaning to the novel. Do not merely sum up the ways in which she conforms.

PRACTICE FREE RESPONSE QUESTION 7

Many of Hurston's critics initially dismissed *Their Eyes Were Watching God* as fiction with no meaning or purpose. Readers have discovered, however, that, while her novel is not overtly political, it does address many pertinent social issues. In a well-written essay, identify and discuss the central questions the novel raises and the answers that it offers.

PRACTICE MULTIPLE CHOICE QUESTIONS 1—6

Carefully read the passage on page 7 that begins, “They sat there in the fresh young darkness close together” and ends, “young darkness became a monstropolous old thing while Janie talked,” before selecting the best answer for each of the questions that follow:

1. Hurston’s use of dialect is most likely intended to
 - A. shed light on the ignorance of the local townspeople.
 - B. connect the reader with her characters.
 - C. shock the reader.
 - D. lend verisimilitude to her narrative.
 - E. reflect her knowledge of the folklore and cultural norms of Eatonville, Florida.
2. When Janie says, “Unless you see de fur, a mink skin ain’t no different from a coon hide,” she is most likely suggesting that
 - A. Pheoby will judge Janie unfavorably based on the story she is about to tell.
 - B. Pheoby needs illustrations to understand the story Janie is about to tell.
 - C. Pheoby will not understand her story because she has never left Eatonville.
 - D. she and Pheoby are very similar.
 - E. she has not yet shared enough of her story for Pheoby to understand.
3. What tone does Hurston’s use of imagery and personification help her to achieve?
 - A. Hurston employs dark imagery, which results in an ominous tone.
 - B. A light tone sets the stage for joyful revelations from Janie to her old friend Pheoby.
 - C. Hurston uses the phrase “kissing, young darkness” to create a romantic mood.
 - D. Hurston’s use of figurative language creates a sober anticipatory mood.
 - E. Hurston uses figurative language to create suspense and to convey the horror of the tale to follow.
4. The passage suggests that Pheoby
 - A. is a busybody.
 - B. is a dear and trustworthy friend.
 - C. cannot keep a confidence.
 - D. is anxious to get some new gossip for the porch.
 - E. is unhappily married.
5. What possible foreshadowing occurs in this passage?
 - A. Janie’s conversation with Pheoby suggests that Tea Cake may be dead.
 - B. The narrator hints at the future disintegration of Pheoby’s marriage.
 - C. The passage foreshadows Janie’s inevitable demise.
 - D. The passage foreshadows the end of the friendship between Pheoby and Janie.
 - E. The narrator hints that Pheoby and Janie will leave Eatonville together.
6. Hurston’s use of the third-person omniscient narrator allows her to
 - A. establish intimacy between her reader and her characters.
 - B. explore the feelings and thoughts of more than one character.
 - C. show Pheoby to be a less-developed version of Janie.
 - D. make the stories of the Eatonville residents more universal.
 - E. appeal to the artistic tastes of her predominantly white readership.

PRACTICE MULTIPLE CHOICE QUESTIONS 7—11

Carefully read the passage on pages 76 and 77 that begins, “The years took all the fight out of Janie’s face,” and ends, “Eyes a little absent too” before selecting the best answer for each of the questions that follow:

7. The phrase “She had learned how to talk some and to leave some” implies that Janie
 - A. had learned to speak well or hold her tongue.
 - B. used silence in an attempt to exercise her only power.
 - C. explained things before she left her husband.
 - D. did not waste time discussing trivialities.
 - E. had learned how to contribute to the conversations on the porch.
8. The lines, “She didn’t read books so she didn’t know that she was the world and the heavens boiled down to a drop. Man attempting to climb to painless heights from his dung hill,” provide an example of what figurative device?
 - A. simile
 - B. personification
 - C. imagery
 - D. rhetoric
 - E. metaphor
9. The image of the shade tree suggests that Janie
 - A. is enjoying tending the store.
 - B. would rather be outside under a shady tree.
 - C. detaches from her present situation by retreating into fantasy.
 - D. tolerates her husband’s abuse and remains hopeful.
 - E. accepts her situation and makes the best of it.
10. What shift occurs in the language between Hurston’s descriptions of Janie and her description of Jody?
 - A. from subtle figurative language to straightforward physical description
 - B. from optimistic to pessimistic language
 - C. from describing Janie’s positive traits to listing Joe’s negative ones
 - D. from passive to active voice
 - E. from third-person to first-person narration
11. The predominant metaphor in this passage may best be described as relating to
 - A. commerce.
 - B. humanity.
 - C. literature.
 - D. nature.
 - E. Florida.

PRACTICE MULTIPLE CHOICE QUESTIONS 12—16

Carefully read the passage on pages 88 to 90, that begins, “Janie starched and ironed her face and came set in the funeral behind her veil,” and ends, “Like all other tumbling mud-balls, Janie had tried to show her shine” before selecting the best answer for each of the questions that follow:

12. The words “death,” “done,” “darkness,” “deep,” and “dissolution” used closely together create what literary device?
 - A. assonance
 - B. consonance
 - C. synaesthesia
 - D. alliteration
 - E. paralipsis
13. The sentence “Inside the expensive black folds were resurrection and life” conveys what idea to the reader?
 - A. Jody’s death is the beginning of a new life for Janie.
 - B. Janie does not mourn her husband.
 - C. Janie plans to celebrate using her husband’s wealth.
 - D. Jodie died in the springtime.
 - E. Jody’s wealth and power now belong to Janie.
14. The line “sometimes it creaked and cried all night under the weight of lonesomeness” is an example of
 - A. allusion.
 - B. understatement.
 - C. hyperbole.
 - D. dialogue.
 - E. personification.
15. The metaphor of Nanny choking Janie with the horizon refers to the fact that Nanny
 - A. was a strict disciplinarian.
 - B. did not approve of travel.
 - C. forced young Janie to marry.
 - D. knew Killicks would work Janie like a mule.
 - E. was physically abusive.
16. The last paragraph is reminiscent of
 - A. folklore.
 - B. a fable.
 - C. social commentary.
 - D. narrative non-fiction.
 - E. literary allusion.

PRACTICE MULTIPLE CHOICE QUESTIONS 17—19

Carefully read the passage on pages 129-130 that begins, “To Janie’s strange eyes, everything in the Everglades was big and new” and ends, “Po’ man ain’t got no business at de show” before selecting the best answer for each of the questions that follow:

17. In the first six lines of this passage, Hurston employs what rhetorical structure to emphasize the richness of the Everglades?
 - A. assonance
 - B. metaphor
 - C. parallelism
 - D. simile
 - E. euphony
18. Hurston uses the third person narrator to reveal much of what takes place between Janie and her first two husbands in the first half of the novel. In this passage, Janie’s everyday conversation with Tea Cake most likely indicates that
 - A. she does not speak as well as the narrator.
 - B. Janie’s love for Tea Cake has helped her to find her voice.
 - C. Tea Cake considers Janie his equal.
 - D. Janie is not afraid of Tea Cake.
 - E. Tea Cake will not tolerate Janie’s silence.
19. By emphasizing that Janie is new to the “muck,” Hurston is able to
 - A. provide examples of Southern black dialect to her northern, white readers.
 - B. broaden the social and geographical scope of the novel.
 - C. provide exposition about the life and work of the migrants in the Everglades.
 - D. emphasize Tea Cake’s desire to provide for himself and Janie.
 - E. foreshadow the events leading to Tea Cake’s death.

PRACTICE MULTIPLE CHOICE QUESTIONS 20—22

Carefully read the following passage on pages 159-160, beginning, “They huddled closer and stared at the door,” and ending, “He turned back to tell Janie about it so she could be ready to go” before selecting the best answer for each of the questions that follow:

20. Hurston personifies nature in this passage in order to
 - A. emphasize the fierceness of the hurricane.
 - B. contrast the storm with Janie and Tea Cake’s love.
 - C. illustrate the uncertainty of life on the muck.
 - D. portray nature as a living force to be contended with.
 - E. intensify the terror of the occupants of the house.
21. The tone of Janie’s conversation with Tea Cake can best be described as
 - A. reassuring and comforting.
 - B. hopeless and despondent.
 - C. cold and emotionless.
 - D. forlorn and desperate.
 - E. lonely and bewildered.
22. In this passage the line from which the title of the novel is derived, “They seemed to be staring at the dark, but their eyes were watching God,” suggests that the occupants of the shanty are
 - A. questioning their religious beliefs.
 - B. evaluating Seminole pantheism.
 - C. straining to see in the darkness.
 - D. observing events that are beyond their control.
 - E. seeking a religious miracle.

MULTIPLE CHOICE ANSWERS AND EXPLANATIONS

1. Hurston's use of informal diction in dialogue is most likely intended to
 - A. shed light on the ignorance of the local townspeople. Being an anthropologist and a black woman, it is very unlikely that Hurston would attempt to make *any* group appear ignorant.
 - B. connect the reader with her characters. This answer is tempting, but clearly not the best choice.
 - C. shock the reader. There is no social or aesthetic reason Hurston would want to shock her predominantly white readership.
 - D. *lend verisimilitude to her narrative. By having the characters speak as they would in real life, Hurston is portraying Janie and her companions as real human beings, neither stereotypes nor caricatures.*
 - E. reflect her knowledge of the folklore and cultural norms of Eatonville, Florida. While Hurston's writing clearly demonstrates her knowledge, this is certainly not her motivation for writing.

2. When Janie says, "Unless you see de fur, a mink skin ain't no different from a coon hide," she is most likely suggesting that Janie's statement essentially means that, from one side, a worthless hide and priceless fur look identical. From the *other* side, however, the distinction is clear. Therefore, Janie does not want to be judged until *both* sides of the issue of her leaving with Tea Cake and returning alone have been examined. The townspeople know only the "hide" side of the story, not the valuable fur side.
 - A. Pheoby will judge Janie unfavorably based on the story she is about to tell. Pheoby is Janie's friend and not likely to judge her at all, but in the town, the negative judgement has already begun.
 - B. Pheoby needs illustrations to understand the story Janie is about to tell. This choice is almost ludicrously irrelevant.
 - C. Pheoby will not understand her story because she has never left Eatonville. This might be tempting in that Pheoby also sees only the "hide" side, but Janie would not tell her story to someone who was not likely to understand it.
 - D. she and Pheoby are very similar. So, would they both be minks or coons?
 - E. *she has not yet shared enough of her story for Pheoby to understand. As the quotation suggests, the townspeople (Pheoby included) are viewing only the "hide" side of the issue. Once Janie shows Pheoby the "fur" side, she will recognize Janie's life with Tea Cake as valuable.*

3. What tone does Hurston's use of imagery and personification help her to achieve?
- A. Hurston employs dark imagery, which results in an ominous tone. The darkness is described as "fresh, young," which is much more expectant and hopeful than ominous.
 - B. A light tone sets the stage for joyful revelations from Janie to her old friend Pheoby. The "freshness" and "youth" of the darkness might be hopeful, but "joyful" is too far along that scale.
 - C. Hurston uses the phrase "kissing young darkness" to create a romantic mood. Janie is talking to her friend Pheoby. There is intimacy in this passage, but no romance.
 - D. *Hurston's use of figurative language creates a sober anticipatory mood. The young darkness becomes old, and the fresh darkness becoming "monstropolous" while Janie tells her story does add a sober touch to the expectancy.*
 - E. Hurston uses figurative language to create suspense and to convey the horror of the tale to follow. Hurston's creation of suspense might tempt readers, but there is no horror in this passage.
4. The passage suggests that Pheoby
- A. is a busybody. Clearly the other townspeople are the busibodies: sitting on the porch, watching Janie arrive home, and immediately beginning to speculate what humiliations she has had to endure.
 - B. *is a dear and trustworthy friend. Pheoby goes to talk to Janie. She takes Janie food, knowing that Janie will be hungry. Janie says that they have been very good friends.*
 - C. cannot keep a confidence. If this were true, Janie would not offer to tell Pheoby the story.
 - D. is anxious to get some new gossip for the porch. This might be tempting, but is not as compelling a choice as B.
 - E. is unhappily married. Except for Pheoby's casual attitude about whether or not her husband has the sense to find and eat his dinner, there is nothing to suggest that she and her husband are unhappy.
5. What potential foreshadowing occurs in this passage?
- A. *Janie's conversation with Pheoby suggests that Tea Cake may be dead. Janie does say that he is "gone," and that he has not left her for a younger woman or taken any of her money.*
 - B. The narrator hints at the future disintegration of Pheoby's marriage. Again, there is nothing to suggest their marriage is unhappy.
 - C. The passage foreshadows Janie's inevitable demise. Simply not a possibility.
 - D. The passage foreshadows the end of the friendship between Pheoby and Janie. Depending on the tale Janie has to tell and Pheoby's reaction to it, this is certainly a possibility, but one much more inferred than implied by the passage.
 - E. Nothing in this passage suggests this highly unlikely event occurring.

6. Hurston's use of the third-person omniscient narrator allows her to
- A. establish intimacy between her reader and her characters. Intimacy is much more effectively established with the first-person narrator.
 - B. *explore the feelings and thoughts of more than one character. The narrator is able to show the thoughts of the porch-sitters, Pheoby, and Janie.*
 - C. show Pheoby to be a less-developed version of Janie. This is not true on many levels.
 - D. make the stories of the Eatonville residents more universal. This might seem tempting to a novice reader, but the third-person narrator can be unique and individual as well as universal.
 - E. appeal to the artistic tastes of her predominantly white readership. There is nothing to suggest that one culture or society prefers one level of narration over another.
7. The phrase "She had learned how to talk some and to leave some" implies that Janie
- A. had learned to speak well or hold her tongue. This is a mere repetition of the quoted lines.
 - B. *used silence in an attempt to exercise her only power. The story is about Janie's finding her voice. Ironically, once she is free to express herself, she also learns that she has the power not to if she so chooses.*
 - C. explained things before she left her husband. The choice does not make syntactic sense.
 - D. did not waste time discussing trivialities. This might be tempting to some students, but Janie actually longs to join the trivial conversation on the porch.
 - E. had learned how to contribute to the conversations on the porch. This is essentially the opposite of what occurs during Janie's marriage to Jody.
8. The figurative language Hurston employs to describe Janie is known as
- A. a simile. A simile compares two things using like with nouns or as with clauses.
 - B. personification. Personification ascribes human qualities to an idea or an object.
 - C. an image. This is too general a description. An image could refer to anything.
 - D. rhetoric. Rhetoric is persuasive speech.
 - E. *a metaphor. The metaphor compares Janie (a human being) with a "drop" of Heaven.*
9. The image of the shade tree suggests that Janie
- A. enjoys tending the store. Hurston has already established that Janie does not enjoy tending the store.
 - B. would rather be outside under a shady tree. This is too literal an interpretation.
 - C. *detaches from Jody and her present situation by retreating into fantasy in order to cope.*
 - D. tolerates her husband's abuse and remains hopeful. Janie has given up hope.
 - E. accepts her situation and makes the best of it. Though Janie has given up hope, she still dreams of different circumstances.

10. What shift occurs in the language between Hurston's descriptions of Janie and her description of Jody?
- A. *from subtle figurative language to straightforward physical description: The passage begins by alluding to Janie's developing power not to speak, moves through her imaginary escape, and ends with the literal statement that Jody is no longer a young man and falls into his chair rather than sits.*
 - B. from optimistic to pessimistic language: It would be hard to find optimism in the beginning of the passage where Janie is becoming aware of the abuse she receives from Jody and her questioning her own worth as a human being.
 - C. from describing Janie's positive traits to listing Joe's negative ones: This simply does not occur in the passage.
 - D. from passive to active voice. This does not occur in the passage.
 - E. from third-person to first-person narration. The novel stays in the third person throughout, except for a few passages where Janie is talking to Pheoby.
11. The predominant metaphor in this passage may best be described as relating to
- A. commerce. This episode centers on the store, but there are no commercial terms.
 - B. humanity. The focus—except for the one sentence—is personal, about Janie, not about humanity.
 - C. literature. There are no literary allusions in the passage.
 - D. *nature. The images of human trying to climb out of the dung heap, Janie resting in the shade of the tree with the wind blowing in her hair, make this the only viable choice.*
 - E. Florida.
12. The words death, done, darkness, deep, and dissolution used closely together represent what element of style?
- A. assonance is the repetition of identical vowel sounds in close proximity
 - B. consonance is a more general sound device
 - C. synaesthesia is the mixing of senses, as in something "smelling red."
 - D. *alliteration is the repetition of identical consonant sounds in close proximity*
 - E. paralipsis is drawing attention to a detail by seemingly overlooking it
13. The sentence "Inside the expensive black folds were resurrection and life" conveys what idea to the reader?
- A. *Jody's death is the beginning of a new life for Janie. Janie's funeral attire contains, not death, but resurrection, new life.*
 - B. Janie does not mourn her husband. This might be true, but it is not what the quoted passage means.
 - C. Janie plans to celebrate using her husband's wealth. This is both unlikely and not what the quoted passage means.
 - D. Jodie died in the springtime. This is irrelevant.
 - E. Jody's wealth and power now belong to Janie. This is true but does not convey what is meant by the "resurrection" being contained within Janie's veil.

14. The line “sometimes it creaked and cried all night under the weight of lonesomeness” is an example of
- A. allusion. There is no allusion. Literally, the house is merely creaking as older buildings do.
 - B. understatement. Hurston is not downplaying Janie’s loneliness.
 - C. hyperbole. This might be tempting but is not the best choice available.
 - D. dialogue. The narrator is speaking.
 - E. *personification. By saying that the house cried and that the creaking was due to lonesomess are examples of personification.*
15. The metaphor of Nanny choking Janie with the horizon refers to the fact that Nanny
- A. was a strict disciplinarian. This may be true, but, like E below, there was no evidence of literal abuse in the passage.
 - B. did not approve of travel. This choice makes no sense.
 - C. *forced young Janie to marry. The horizon has been established as a symbol of Janie’s desire to seek beyond herself, to grow, and her early marriage all but destroyed her hopes of this happening. She was “choked” by her own desire.*
 - D. knew Killicks would work Janie like a mule. This ignores the idea of Janie’s horizon.
 - E. was physically abusive. Again, there is no evidence that Janie was actually abused by her grandmother.
16. The last paragraph is reminiscent of
- A. *folklore. It is almost a myth about the creation of humanity and the reason a person’s value seems to be so deeply hidden.*
 - B. a fable. The mythic final paragraph does not have identifiable characters, narrative thread, or stated moral.
 - C. social commentary. This is true, but not really a genre.
 - D. narrative non-fiction. Too modern and clinical a term.
 - E. literary allusion. This might be tempting if we had evidence that the myth Hurston develops came from some other source, but there is no such evidence.
17. In the first paragraph of this passage, Hurston employs what rhetorical structure to emphasize the richness of the Everglades?

“To Janie’s strange eyes, everything in the Everglades was big and new. Big Lake Okechobee, big beans, big cane, big weeds, big everything. Weeds that did well to grow waist high up the state were eight and often ten feet tall down there. Ground so rich that everything went **wild**. Volunteer cane just taking the place. Dirt roads so rich and black that a half mile of it would have fertilized a Kansas wheat field. **Wild cane** on either side of the road hiding the rest of the world. **People wild too.**” (p. 129)

The rhetorical repetition of adjective phrases and the repeated use of “big” and “wild” creates a rhythmic pattern, but no compelling sound effect. Thus, A and E are eliminated. The description of the bigness and wildness is quite literal, thus eliminating B and D. The phrases and rhythmic repetition of the words is clearly parallelism, C.

18. Hurston uses the third person narrator to reveal much of what takes place between Janie and her first two husbands in the first half of the novel. In this passage, Janie's everyday conversation with Tea Cake most likely indicates that
- A. she does not speak as well as the narrator. None of the characters do, yet Hurston allows them to speak, so this cannot be the reason Janie is silent.
 - B. *Janie's love for Tea Cake has helped her to find her voice. Janie's finding her voice is one of the key issues in the book. So when she meets Tea Cake, who accepts her as she is and allows her to be, Hurston allows the reader to hear Janie's voice as well.*
 - C. Tea Cake considers Janie his equal in conversation. This is true, but could still be conveyed through third-person narration.
 - D. Janie is not afraid of Tea Cake. Janie was not necessarily "afraid" of her two previous husbands.
 - E. Tea Cake will not tolerate Janie's silence. Nothing in the text supports this.
19. By emphasizing that Janie is new to the "muck," Hurston is able to
- A. provide examples of Southern black dialect to her northern, white readers. Hurston has already accomplished this.
 - B. broaden the social and geographical scope of the novel. This would be accomplished by the move to the Everglades whether Janie were new there or not.
 - C. *provide exposition about the life and work of the migrants in the Everglades. Because this is a new experience for Janie, Tea Cake explains to her—and thus to the reader—what life and work will be like there.*
 - D. emphasize Tea Cake's desire to provide for himself and Janie. This is also already well established.
 - E. foreshadow the events leading to Tea Cake's death. By the time of Tea Cake's death, Janie is no longer a newcomer on the muck.
20. Hurston personifies Nature in this passage in order to
- A. emphasize the fierceness of the hurricane. This might be a tempting response, but personification *per se* is not necessary to do this.
 - B. contrast the storm with Janie and Tea Cake's love. There is a contrast between the violence outside and the tenderness inside, but, again, this is not a result of the personification.
 - C. illustrate the uncertainty of life on the muck. Again, this would not demand personification.
 - D. *portray Nature as a living force to be contended with. As even the title of the novel suggests, God and Nature are present to the occupants of the house like living beings. This storm is not merely a swirl of wind, but a threatening Being.*
 - E. intensify the terror of the occupants of the house. The personification is about the storm, not the occupants of the house.

21. The tone of Janie's conversation with Tea Cake can best be described as
- A. *reassuring and comforting. Especially contrasted with the violence outside.*
 - B. hopeless and despondent. Tea Cake does worry about their dying in the storm, but Janie is reassuring and confident.
 - C. cold and emotionless. Janie confesses very strong love for—and trust in—Tea Cake.
 - D. forlorn and desperate. Again, Janie is too comforting and optimistic.
 - E. lonely and bewildered. They may be questioning their decision to stay and wondering what to do next, but one of the key points of the passage is their togetherness during this trial.
22. In this passage the line from which the title of the novel is derived, "They seemed to be staring at the dark, but their eyes were watching God," suggests that the occupants of the shanty are
- A. questioning their religious beliefs. This might be tempting, but the passage seems more to suggest a strong belief in the God who is making the storm rage in the darkness outside.
 - B. evaluating Seminole pantheism. There is *nothing* in the passage to suggest this.
 - C. straining to see in the darkness. This is explicitly stated in the passage, not merely "suggested."
 - D. *observing events that are beyond their control. They cannot control the storm. They cannot control the darkness. Those forces are more powerful than they are.*
 - E. seeking a religious miracle. The "watching" is much more passive than "seeking" a miracle would be.

Their Eyes Were Watching God

Advanced Placement in English Literature and Composition Teaching Unit

Study Guide Teacher's Copy

Chapter 1

1. Why does Hurston open the novel with an analogy? What authorial purpose does it serve?

The analogy serves to define her narrative as a tale experienced and told by a strong woman. It indicates that she is unapologetic for the intrinsically feminine perspective of the narrative. In fact, the author obviously celebrates this point of view.

2. What conclusions can you draw about Janie Starks, her character, and the events in her life based on the dialogue of her neighbors?

The reader may infer that many members of the community are or were envious of Janie. It appears she left a respectable position in the community and took off with a younger man, which might point to strength and independence or to foolishness. The reader knows, however, to be careful not to believe too readily information supplied by obviously envious gossips.

3. How does Hurston's narrative voice differ from the dialogue of her characters?

Hurston uses a third-person omniscient narrator who employs a sophisticated, poetic voice, whereas her characters speak in colloquialisms and idiomatic discourse.

4. In what sense does the novel begin at the end of Janie's story? What is the literary term for this type of structure?

A middle-aged Janie Starks returns to the town of Eatonville, Florida, after having left with a younger man some two years prior. The townsfolk watched her go, beautifully dressed and happy. As the novel opens, they watch her unceremonious return and are eager to know what has happened. This is called a frame narrative.

5. Hurston locates her protagonist in Eatonville, Florida, her own hometown. How does this fulfill one of the major purposes of setting?

Locating Janie in Eatonville, and later the Everglades, grounds the character in the real world. Hurston uses setting to give Janie ties to reality. This lends verisimilitude to the narrative, thus fulfilling one of the major purposes of setting.

Chapter 2

1. How does the pear tree symbolize Janie's quest for self-fulfillment?

Hurston employs the life / tree metaphor immediately in Chapter 2: "Janie saw her life like a great tree in leaf with the things suffered, things enjoyed, things done and undone. Dawn and doom was in the branches." (pg. 8) Later, Janie is "summoned to behold a revelation" under the blossoming pear tree. (pg. 11) As she watches a bee pollinate a flower, Janie feels a heretofore-unidentified yearning. Through the haze of pollen and adolescence (she is sixteen), a shiftless, rag wearing, skinny boy morphs into the fulfillment of that yearning. The kiss the two share serves as the catalyst for Nanny forcing Janie to marry an older respectable, albeit unattractive, farmer. Hence, "The vision of Logan Killicks was desecrating the pear tree." (pg. 14)

2. How does Hurston reveal Nanny's motivation for forcing Janie to marry? Is that motivation pure, malevolent, or something in between?

Hurston uses the character's own words to reveal her motivation. Men had raped both Nanny and her mother, and it profoundly and negatively affected the course of each of their lives. Nanny reveals that she feels death approaching, and she does not want to die until she knows Janie will be safe from such a fate. "'Tain't Logan Killicks Ah wants you to have, baby, it's protection." (pg. 15)

3. While Hurston achieved success in so-called "white publication" and received critical acclaim from white critics, her black contemporaries harshly criticized her and her work. What events in Janie's life parallel this situation?

While Janie lived happily with the white Washburn family, her black schoolmates taunted her mercilessly about her parentage and her living situation.

Chapter 3

1. How, and why, do Janie and Nanny differ in their ideas of love?

Nanny maintains a purely pragmatic view of love based on her own bitter experiences. After all, she was a slave abused by white and black men alike. Janie, having enjoyed her grandmother's and the Washburn family's protection her whole life, romanticizes love because of her innocence.

2. Describe the prevailing tone of this chapter. Identify the elements that set the tone.

A tone of resignation prevails in Chapter 3. Hurston uses the poetic voice of the narrator to highlight Nanny's dawning realization that her attempt to protect Janie has instead caused her great pain and disillusionment. "Nanny entered this infinity of conscious pain again on her knees." (pg. 24) Despite her pain, Nanny resigns herself to the fact that she has done all she can on Janie's behalf. Meanwhile, Janie surrenders her girlish dreams of love. "She knew now that marriage did not make love. Janie's first dream was dead, so she became a woman." (pg. 25)

Chapter 4

1. What does Joe (Jody) Starks represent to Janie?

Jody represents another step toward the symbolic horizon. He may give her another chance to explore her youthful notions of herself. He also represents change from her present circumstances.

2. How does Jody's character begin to establish Hurston's theme of male dominance and aggression? Contrast this with Janie's first husband, Logan Killicks.

Jody tells Janie what she should be and do. He outlines his ambitions for her in relation to himself. He talks of travel and success. He wants to become a big voice, to exude power. Logan Killicks, on the other hand, was content to remain static. He believes his power lies in being able to provide for Janie.

3. What symbolic meaning does the horizon begin to assume?

The horizon symbolizes that which is desired but just out of reach. Janie is seeking some form of self-determination, her own voice.

Chapter 5

1. What type of power does Jody come to represent in the scheme of the book?

Jody is politically and economically ambitious. He quickly gains power in Eatonville. But his power is controlling and manipulative. Janie becomes a possession—a trophy. She must hide her beautiful hair under a rag so that no one but him can enjoy looking at it. She is not allowed to enjoy the fellowship of the townspeople or participate in their social activities because such things are beneath the wife of the mayor. He likewise alienates and intimidates the townsfolk with his egomania.

2. In what ways does Hurston relate power to language?

Jody uses his power to silence Janie's voice, even when others ask her to speak. Even at the beginning of the book, Janie has a story to tell, but he gives the story to Pheoby to tell for her—to a certain extent abdicating her power.

3. How does Jody attempt to control Janie? Does he ultimately succeed?

Jody attempts to suppress her speech. He further attempts to suppress her femininity by forcing her to hide her hair. He also keeps her from joining conversations and games on the porch further exerting his desire to make her an extension of himself and nothing more. Though Janie appears to acquiesce, she balks inside and never fully submits to Jody.

4. What does Janie's hair symbolize?

Janie's hair symbolizes her unique identity and her femininity. It also symbolizes her power over men and over herself. She has female strength Jody forbids her to use.

Chapter 6

1. Why do you suppose Hurston uses the third person narrator to reveal what Janie is thinking while using dialogue to allow us to get to know her husband and the other Eatonville residents?

Throughout the novel, Hurston weaves a relationship between language and power. At this stage of the novel, Janie feels powerless. She has not yet found her voice. Thus, she remains silent.

2. What is the significance of Janie's verbal outbursts to the gathering on the porch?

They represent the fact that Janie is seeking her voice. She may not be allowed to participate in their conversations, but she will not remain silent forever.

3. What conflict does the conversation between Pheoby's husband and Lige Moss center around? How is it significant to the developing theme of the novel?

Their conversation reveals the conflict between humanity's natural tendencies and environment (nature vs. nurture). It is significant on several levels. First of all, at a time in United States history when—especially in the South—blacks were considered inferior to whites, the people in Eatonville, Florida were thriving, proving that environment was a major contributor to one's success or failure. Janie, too, is struggling with discovering her nature and fighting an environment that keeps it suppressed.

4. What motivates Jody to suppress Janie?

Jody's ego will not allow Janie to be an individual, equal to him. To him, she is a possession, a trophy, for others to admire and envy from a distance.

Chapter 7

1. In what way does Janie reassert herself in this chapter? How does Jody react to it?

Janie realizes that Jody is publicly ridiculing her to distract customers from his own failings. Hence, she finally uses her voice to defend herself, and then she launches a verbal attack against him. He reacts by striking her with all of his might.

2. What potential foreshadowing regarding Jody can be found in this chapter?

Hurston writes, "There was nothing to do in life anymore," (pg. 80) suggesting that Jody may succumb in the face of his physical failings and Janie's assertion of power.

3. What is the significance of the allusion: "The thing that Saul's daughter had done to David" (pg. 79)?

In the Old Testament book of I Samuel, David has married Saul's younger daughter, Michal. When Saul plots to kill his son-in-law, Michal betrays her father and saves her husband's life. Years later, David returns to claim his wife. He no longer loves her (if he ever did), but he considers her his possession and no one else has a right to claim her. This parallels Jody's treatment of Janie. She has helped him become as financially and politically successful as he is, but he grows more and more bitter toward her, considering her nothing more than a possession.

Chapter 8

1. What do the following metaphors that begin Chapter 8 suggest? "He had crawled off to lick his wounds." "But the stillness was the sleep of swords." "Well, if she must eat out of a long-handled spoon, she must." (pg. 81)

The metaphors all emphasize the changed nature of Janie's and Jody's relationship and the resulting change in the atmosphere of the town. Jody has been reduced from domineering tyrant to wounded animal. Where there had been conversation in the town and on the porch of the store, there is now silence, but, for Janie, it is an uneasy silence. Having lost his control over Janie, Jody cannot even banish her from his sickroom, although, for Janie to assert her right as his wife to care for her husband is tantamount to eating with the devil (with a long-handled spoon).

2. What does the narrator reveal about Jody that Janie does not know?

The narrator reveals that Jody is motivated by a desire to appear normal and strong to Janie.

3. How is the couple's situation ironic? What type of irony is it?

Jody believes that Janie has used voodoo against him. However, she does use the power of language to assert herself, thus rendering him powerless. The assertion of her power while he is losing his physical power becomes too much for him to endure. This constitutes situational irony.

Chapter 9

1. Why does Janie burn her head rags?

This act signifies the beginning of Janie's movement toward independence and self-definition. Part of this is the freedom to enjoy and display her femininity.

2. Why does Janie hate her grandmother?

Janie hates her grandmother for forcing her into a loveless marriage. She also resents how her grandmother brought her up to believe there were things more important than love.

3. Explain what Hurston means by saying that Nanny choked Janie with the horizon. Did Nanny intend to hurt Janie?

Hurston has used the horizon to symbolize those dreams of Janie that remain just out of reach, especially dreams of self-awareness and love. Just at the time Janie was becoming aware of these dreams, Nanny panicked about Janie's sexual attractiveness and married her to the old and undesirable Logan, thus delaying—if not destroying—Janie's ever reaching that horizon.

4. How does Hurston weave folklore into this chapter?

She uses a folktale to illustrate Janie wanting to meet and commune with people. "When God had made The Man, he made him out of stuff that sung all the time and glittered all over. Then after that some angels got jealous and chopped him into millions of pieces, but still he glittered and hummed. So they beat him down to nothing but sparks but each little spark had a shine and a song. So they covered each one over with mud. The sparks make them hunt for one another, but the mud is deaf and dumb. Like all the other tumbling mud-balls, Janie had tried to show her shine." (pg. 90)

5. Why does Janie discourage all of her suitors?

As she discloses to Pheoby, Janie enjoys her freedom and independence too much to rush into marriage.

Chapter 10

1. Why is the checker game between Janie and Tea Cake significant?

The checker game with Tea Cake is Janie's first. It is significant because it suggests that he treats her like an equal. Jody Starks always pontificated that women were not smart enough for the game.

2. What is Tea Cake's real name, and what does he look like?

His real name is Vergible Woods. He is tall with full purple lips and full, lazy eyes with long, curly lashes. He has broad shoulders and a narrow waist.

3. Describe the overall tone of this chapter. How do the attitudes of Janie and Tea Cake affect the tone?

The overall tone is lighthearted and optimistic. The couple flirts. They laugh and enjoy each other's company.

Chapter 11

1. How does Tea Cake fulfill Janie's original youthful yearnings under the pear tree?

Janie sees Tea Cake as the fulfillment of her wish because he talks sweetly to her about her physical beauty, treats her with the respect one accords an equal, and he talks to her about exploration and enjoying life. She is attracted to him both physically and emotionally. She no longer concerns herself with material things, as Nanny had trained her to do, but she experiences true joy and romance, which transcends even the age difference. He is both her lover and her friend. He is the epitome of romantic love represented by the pear tree.

2. What conflict does the following passage reveal? Analyze the tone of the following passage. What element creates the tone?

“In the cool of the afternoon the fiend from hell specially sent to lovers arrived at Janie’s ear. Doubt. All the fears that circumstance could provide and the heart feel, attacked her on every side. This was a new sensation for her, but no less excruciating. If only Tea Cake would make her certain! He did not return that night nor the next and so she plunged into the abyss and descended to the ninth darkness where light has never been.” (pg. 108)

The passage reveals Janie’s inner conflict over Tea Cake. When he is with her, she feels secure in his interest and his motives; when he is gone, doubt plagues her.

The tone of the passage is ominous, quite possibly foreshadowing Janie’s abandonment, heartbreak, and humiliation. First, Hurston contrasts the cool of the afternoon with hell. Then, she uses the words “attacked” and “excruciating” to indicate the raging conflict between love and doubt.

Finally, the image of the dark abyss suggests the depth of Janie’s insecurity.

Chapter 12

1. How does Pheoby play the role of devil’s advocate in this chapter?

Pheoby’s husband confides in her that the townsfolk do not approve of Janie’s affair with Tea Cake. Pheoby has Janie’s best interests at heart and wants Janie to be happy. However, she must first make sure that Janie’s eyes are open to all of the negative possibilities. Thus, she shares the information with Janie in order to elicit a response and gauge Janie’s awareness. She addresses the issue of Tea Cake’s lower class, Tea Cake’s poverty, and Tea Cake’s possible motivations. Janie convinces her she knows what she is doing. After Pheoby warns her one last time, the two friends share the joy of Janie’s newfound love.

2. Compare and contrast Janie’s feelings toward the community—as represented by the porch gatherers—when she was married to Jody and now that she is with Tea Cake.

When Janie was married to Jody, he forbade both her social interaction with the community and entertainment for the sake of it. Hence, Janie hungered for association with the gathering on the porch who laughed and enjoyed themselves and each other. Now that Tea Cake has introduced her to the joys of living in the moment with no social limitations, she sees the porch gatherers as spiteful gossipers.

Chapter 13

1. After Tea Cake and Janie marry, why do you suppose she keeps silent about the \$200 she has hidden in her clothes? Is this behavior consistent with Janie's character?

Janie relies on her intuition. She still feels slightly wary of Tea Cake, and the money represents her power to get back home should he mistreat her or abandon her. This behavior fits in with Janie's newfound ability to rely on herself for everything. Having suffered two bad marriages and having recently found herself, she is not quick to relinquish her power to another man.

2. Explain the significance of Mrs. Tyler to the plot line.

Annie Tyler was fifty-two-year-old widow with an inheritance. She was renowned in Eatonville for her love affairs with younger men on whom she wasted her money. A man convinced Mrs. Tyler to leave town with him, then he took her money and abandoned her. She returned to Eatonville a broken woman. Hurston writes, "She had waited all her life for something, and it had killed her when it found her." (pg. 120) Janie obviously identifies with Mrs. Tyler, and begins to think of herself as ridiculous in Tea Cake's absence. This sets the stage for Janie's relief at his return and allows the reader to believe that Janie would be so grateful she would not complain about his disappearance.

3. What is significant about the fact that Tea Cake refuses to touch Janie's money and insists that he will provide for her?

Tea Cake's determination to be the provider for Janie establishes that he married her for love and not merely for her money. That Tea Cake might be interested only in her money was the primary reason Janie kept the money she'd brought with her a secret.

4. What is ironic about Tea Cake's determination to provide for them?

It would appear as though Tea Cake is determined to make/keep Janie dependent on him just as Logan Killick and Jody Starks did, but his refusal to touch her money actually helps her establish and maintain an autonomy and independence that Janie's earlier two marriages denied her.

Chapter 14

1. What contrasting ideas dominate this chapter?

Hurston juxtaposes the utter poverty of the migrant workers with the absolute joy these poverty-stricken people find in their lives.

2. What do these ideas represent to Janie?

Janie has known wealth and political power, but she was excluded from friendly society. When she first became involved with Tea Cake, the other townspeople criticized him for having no money or power, but it is with Tea Cake that Janie truly comes alive.

3. How and why is this change in setting significant to the plot?

Hurston takes her protagonist from her familiar and confining Eatonville surroundings to the lush, wild world of the Florida Everglades.

4. How is this move to the Everglades significant to the structure of the narrative?

This signals the second half of the book. All that transpires during the nearly two years that Janie is absent from Eatonville is about to be revealed.

5. What symbolic significance do the Everglades take on?

The Everglades become the rich and fertile ground where Janie's character will flourish and come to fruition. Life— real life— is on the muck, not in society, not even the society of the black town of Eatonville.

6. What might Tea Cake's teaching Janie to shoot symbolize? How is the fact that Janie becomes a better shot than Tea Cake significant?

The gun is a common symbol of masculine power. Janie masters use of the weapon even better than her husband, thus establishing her power. This is significant because it helps to establish the strength of Janie's character, and it also allows the reader to see that, of all the men Janie has had in her life, Tea Cake is the one not threatened by Janie's autonomy and strength of character.

7. What might Janie's learning to shoot even better than Tea Cake foreshadow?

The fact that Tea Cake teaches Janie to shoot a gun and that she becomes a better shot than he probably foreshadows an event in which Janie will have to use her gun either to save Tea Cake or against him.

8. What is Hurston establishing by having Janie go out to work with Tea Cake?

Hurston is establishing several things. First of all, many critics see Tea Cake's missing Janie and skipping work to stay home with her as a means of manipulation. However, by having Janie join him in the fields, Tea Cake is once again establishing Janie's status as his equal. Jody forced Janie to work in his store, but she worked more like a lowly employee than a partner. On the muck, the work is more menial, but Tea Cake and Janie are indeed equal partners.

Chapter 15

1. Why does Hurston devote this chapter to Janie's jealousy of Nunkie?

This chapter serves to emphasize the depth of Janie's feelings for Tea Cake. The love and desire she feels is all encompassing; it has begun to define who she is. He possesses her. This will prove to be pivotal to the climax of the novel.

Chapter 16

1. What subtle shift in narration occurs in this chapter?

The narrator begins to adopt some of the characters' speech patterns.

2. What authorial purpose does this change in narrative voice serve?

This change serves to increase the sympathy of the narrative voice, thus connecting the narration more firmly to the dialogue of the characters. It adds cohesion.

3. Contrast the new, more sympathetic narrative voice with the formal, poetic voice used at the end of the chapter.

The high, poetic voice of the narrator has always contrasted with the dialect of the characters. Now the narrative voice varies in style and begins to contrast with itself. The more sympathetic narrative voice in this chapter serves to blur the lines between the narrator's and Janie's voices. The blurred lines continue until passages near the end of the chapter where the narrator pontificates about Mrs. Turner's racism. The voice then becomes poetic and the language strong.

Chapter 17

1. Is Tea Cake acting out of character when he beats Janie?

Tea Cake feels threatened and responds in a way that seems out of character on the surface. In truth, he has come from a world where men often exert physical control over women. The fact that he does not make a habit of hitting her is testament to the uniqueness of their relationship, in a time and culture where spousal abuse is almost customary.

2. Why do you suppose Janie remains silent in the face of Tea Cake's physical abuse?

Janie's silence may once again represent her power. She can choose to use her voice or remain silent. Her silence is self-imposed, not a result of Tea Cake's intimidation. On the other hand, Janie's silence may indicate her complete submission to Tea Cake. She does not bear resentment toward him after he hits her.

Chapter 18

1. In the face of the hurricane, how does Tea Cake's belief system reveal itself to mirror that of Jody Starks?

Jody believed in his ability to control everything and everyone around him. He carved out a town and a life based on those beliefs. He died in the face of the truth. When faced with the approaching hurricane, Tea Cake believes first that he knows better than all the people fleeing, and then that the storm will not hurt them. He believes himself master over the muck, to his detriment.

2. What practical role does the hurricane play in the narrative structure of the novel and the development of the novel's theme?

Janie has found love. She has found her voice, and she is happy with her life with Tea Cake. This should be the end of the novel, except for the fact that, in her love for Tea Cake, Janie still has not attained autonomy. Something must happen to threaten and/or actually destroy Janie's static contentment.

3. In what way is the hurricane the high point of Janie's and Tea Cake's relationship?

The hurricane cements Janie's relationship with Tea Cake as the culmination of her lifelong quest to love and be loved in return. They work together to survive. When she attempts to cover him with a tarp and ends up falling in the water, Tea Cake responds in kind by jumping in to save her. Thus, they meet the ultimate challenge.

4. How does Hurston revisit the theme of community before, during, and after the hurricane?

The transients on the muck have formed a community, which extends to the natives. They express concern for the ones who remain behind. Those who choose to wait out the storm, though in separate shanties, have a sense of community questioning God. More specifically, Tea Cake, Janie, and Motor Boat begin to wait out the storm together. After the hurricane, the survivors come together to commiserate and console one another.

5. How does Hurston once again weave folklore into the narrative?

Hurston reiterates the story of Big John the Conqueror, first referenced by the porch gatherers in Eatonville.

Chapter 19

1. How is Motor Boat's survival ironic?

Motor Boat was merely too exhausted to continue to run away from the storm with Janie and Tea Cake. Hence, his surviving the storm by remaining in harm's way, while his friends had to battle near to the death, is ironic.

2. What is the significance of the instructions given by the white workers to the black men they forcefully enlisted to help bury the dead?

The nameless white men instruct Tea Cake and the others to bury only black people in the mass graves because the white people are to be buried in pine boxes. This is significant because it is Hurston's only real reference to white racism. Mrs. Turner may have disliked other blacks, but these whites are the first to reveal their racism in the novel. The novel is set in the thirties in a South still under the control of Jim Crow laws. Hurston chose, however, to write a story with universal rather than cultural themes.

3. What do the circumstances of Tea Cake's death illustrate about Janie?

Janie nurses Tea Cake as much as is humanly possible until his rabies-induced madness overcomes him. The fact that she shoots him in self-defense, and is able to take his life to save her own, illustrates that she has finally achieved autonomy.

4. Why does Hurston have Tea Cake's death run as it does: the three empty chambers in the gun, Janie's hesitation to fire her rifle, etc.?

Hurston needs to make it absolutely clear to her reader that Janie kills Tea Cake in self-defense, fearful of her own life. Tea Cake fires his pistol three times before Janie fires her rifle, and even then only because Tea Cake is moving to fire his pistol again and Janie knows this fourth chamber has a bullet in it.

5. How does Hurston establish Janie's powerlessness as a black woman in white society?

Hurston does not allow the reader to hear Janie's voice at all during her trial.

Chapter 20

1. Besides Janie's desire to plant the seeds in remembrance of Tea Cake, what do the seeds represent?

The seeds left by Tea Cake represent the seeds of discovery and hope he planted in Janie. Those seeds grew and blossomed into real love and now transform into self-actualization, self-awareness, and self-fulfillment.

2. What unifying theme comes full circle in Janie's revelations to Pheoby?

The idea of one's power as it relates to language comes full circle. Janie Mae Crawford Killicks Starks Woods had found her voice.

3. As Janie returns to the bedroom she last shared with Tea Cake, what symbolic quest finally ends?

Janie's quest to discover the horizon has been fulfilled. She found true love, and in so doing, she found her best self. Hurston writes, "Here was peace. She pulled in her horizon like a great fish-net... So much of life in its meshes. She called in her soul to come and see." (pg. 193)

4. Hurston enhances her frame narrative with her expert use of imagery. Relate the imagery with which Hurston begins the novel with the imagery with which she closes the novel.

Hurston opens the novel with ships at a distance carrying man's wish. "For some," she writes, "come in with the tide. For others they sail forever on the horizon..." She closes the novel with Janie gathering her horizon like a fish net. The far horizon at the beginning of the novel has been reached.

Their Eyes Were Watching God

Advanced Placement in English Literature and Composition Teaching Unit

Study Guide Student Copy

Chapter 1

1. Why does Hurston open the novel with an analogy? What authorial purpose does it serve?
2. What conclusions can you draw about Janie Starks, her character, and the events in her life based on the dialogue of her neighbors?
3. How does Hurston's narrative voice differ from the dialogue of her characters?
4. In what sense does the novel begin at the end of Janie's story? What is the literary term for this type of structure?
5. Hurston locates her protagonist in Eatonville, Florida, her own hometown. How does this fulfill one of the major purposes of setting?

Chapter 2

1. How does the pear tree symbolize Janie's quest for self-fulfillment?
2. How does Hurston reveal Nanny's motivation for forcing Janie to marry? Is that motivation pure, malevolent, or something in between?
3. While Hurston achieved success in so-called "white publication" and received critical acclaim from white critics, her black contemporaries harshly criticized her and her work. What events in Janie's life parallel this situation?

Chapter 3

1. How, and why, do Janie and Nanny differ in their ideas of love?
2. Describe the prevailing tone of this chapter. Identify the elements that set the tone.

Chapter 4

1. What does Joe (Jody) Starks represent to Janie?
2. How does Jody's character begin to establish Hurston's theme of male dominance and aggression? Contrast this with Janie's first husband, Logan Killicks.
3. What symbolic meaning does the horizon begin to assume?

Chapter 5

1. What type of power does Jody come to represent in the scheme of the book?
2. In what ways does Hurston relate power to language?
3. How does Jody attempt to control Janie? Does he ultimately succeed?
4. What does Janie's hair symbolize?

Chapter 6

1. Why do you suppose Hurston uses the third person narrator to reveal what Janie is thinking while using dialogue to allow us to get to know her husband and the other Eatonville residents?
2. What is the significance of Janie's verbal outbursts to the gathering on the porch?
3. What conflict does the conversation between Pheoby's husband and Lige Moss center around? How is it significant to the developing theme of the novel?
4. What motivates Jody to suppress Janie?

Chapter 7

1. In what way does Janie reassert herself in this chapter? How does Jodie react to it?
2. What potential foreshadowing regarding Jody can be found in this chapter?
3. What is the significance of the allusion: "The thing that Saul's daughter had done to David" (pg. 79)?

Chapter 8

1. What do the following metaphors that begin Chapter 8 suggest? “He had crawled off to lick his wounds.” “But the stillness was the sleep of swords.” “Well, if she must eat out of a long-handled spoon, she must.” (pg. 81)
2. What does the narrator reveal about Jody that Janie does not know?
3. How is the couple’s situation ironic? What type of irony is it?

Chapter 9

1. Why does Janie burn her head rags?
2. Why does Janie hate her grandmother?
3. Explain what Hurston means by saying that Nanny choked Janie with the horizon. Did Nanny intend to hurt Janie?
4. How does Hurston weave folklore into this chapter?
5. Why does Janie discourage all of her suitors?

Chapter 10

1. Why is the checker game between Janie and Tea Cake significant?
2. What is Tea Cake's real name, and what does he look like?
3. Describe the overall tone of this chapter. How do the attitudes of Janie and Tea Cake affect the tone?

Chapter 11

1. How does Tea Cake fulfill Janie's original youthful yearnings under the pear tree?
2. What conflict does the following passage reveal? Analyze the tone of the following passage. What element creates the tone?

“In the cool of the afternoon the fiend from hell specially sent to lovers arrived at Janie's ear. Doubt. All the fears that circumstance could provide and the heart feel, attacked her on every side. This was a new sensation for her, but no less excruciating. If only Tea Cake would make her certain! He did not return that night nor the next and so she plunged into the abyss and descended to the ninth darkness where light has never been.” (pg. 108)

Chapter 12

1. How does Pheoby play the role of devil's advocate in this chapter?
2. Compare and contrast Janie's feelings toward the community—as represented by the porch gatherers—when she was married to Jody and now that she is with Tea Cake.

Chapter 13

1. After Tea Cake and Janie marry, why do you suppose she keeps silent about the \$200 she has hidden in her clothes? Is this behavior consistent with Janie's character?
2. Explain the significance of Mrs. Tyler to the plot line.
3. What is significant about the fact that Tea Cake refuses to touch Janie's money and insists that he will provide for her?
4. What is ironic about Tea Cake's determination to provide for them?

Chapter 14

1. What contrasting ideas dominate this chapter?
2. What do these ideas represent to Janie?
3. How and why is this change in setting significant to the plot?
4. How is this move to the Everglades significant to the structure of the narrative?
5. What symbolic significance do the Everglades take on?
6. What might Tea Cake's teaching Janie to shoot symbolize? How is the fact that Janie becomes a better shot than Tea Cake significant?
7. What might Janie's learning to shoot even better than Tea Cake foreshadow?
8. What is Hurston establishing by having Janie go out to work with Tea Cake?

Chapter 15

1. Why does Hurston devote this chapter to Janie's jealousy of Nunkie?

Chapter 16

1. What subtle shift in narration occurs in this chapter?
2. What authorial purpose does this change in narrative voice serve?
3. Contrast the new, more sympathetic narrative voice with the formal, poetic voice used at the end of the chapter.

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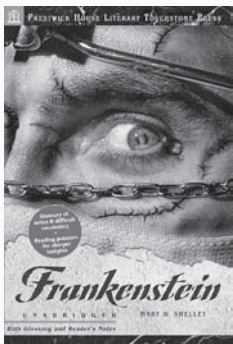
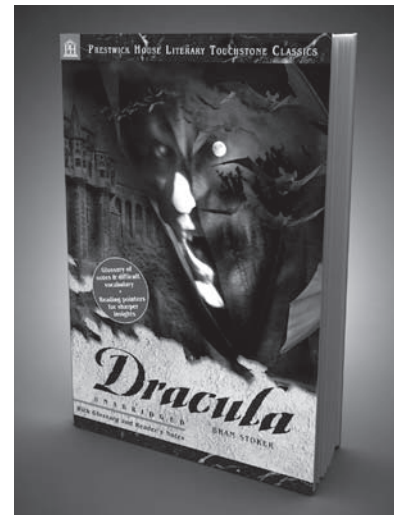
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