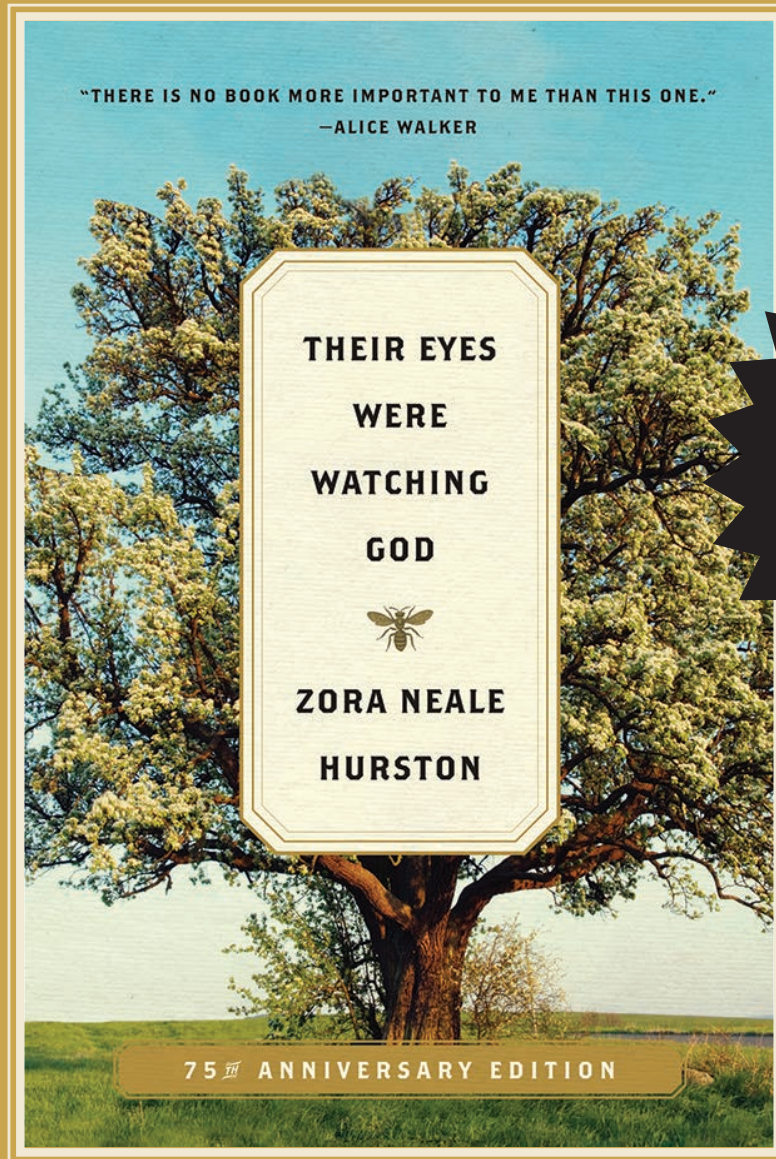


A TEACHER'S GUIDE TO



ALIGNED
TO THE
COMMON
CORE

ZORA NEALE HURSTON'S
Their Eyes Were Watching God

"No book is more important to me than this one." —Alice Walker

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NOTE TO TEACHERS

The questions and activities in this teaching guide were written to support standards-based instruction. *Their Eyes Were Watching God* meets the standard for **Range of Reading and Level of Text Complexity** for grades 11-12. It is an excellent anchor text for courses in either American or Multicultural Literature.

A complete list of the Common Core State Standards can be found at <http://www.corestandards.org/the-standards>.

This Teacher's Guide is divided into three sections. The first, "**Guided Reading Questions**," will help students with reading comprehension and appreciation. These questions can be used as a guide for annotating the text, journal responses, or discussion. A focus on analysis of Hurston's use of language is embedded within the questions. The second section, "**Writing and Discussion Prompts**," consists of analytical writing and discussion prompts and is subdivided into genres based on the writing standards. Consulting established literary criticism may be beneficial for advanced students, but it is not necessary. The third section, "**Research Topics**," requires students to conduct and synthesize significant outside research on topics related to the novel.

IMPORTANT RESOURCES

ZoraNealeHurston.com has a special section for teachers where you'll find:

- [A video of Lucy Anne Hurston](#) reading the opening pages of her aunt's novel *Their Eyes Were Watching God* to help students hear and understand the beauty of the book's dialect.
- [A biographical timeline](#) of Zora Neale Hurston's life
- And much more

OTHER RESOURCES

For additional guides aligned to the common core, please visit academic.hc.com/commoncore

Guided Reading Questions

Write routinely over extended time frames (time for research, reflection, and revision) and shorter time frames (a single sitting or a day or two) for a range of tasks, purposes, and audiences. **CCSS.ELA-Literacy.W.11-12.10**

CHAPTER ONE

CCSS.ELA-Literacy.RI.11-12.1

CCSS.ELA-Literacy.RH.11-12.1 CCSS.ELA-Literacy.RH.11-12.2

1. Examine the way that Hurston develops the exposition of the novel. How does she establish the setting of the book? How are the characters of Janie Turner and Tea Cake introduced? Whose voices do you hear first?
CCSS.ELA-Literacy.RL.11-12.5
2. Based on the first chapter, what do you think some of the conflicts in the novel are going to be? What do you think the themes might be? Cite evidence from the text to support your predictions. **CCSS.ELA-Literacy.RL.11-12.1**
CCSS.ELA-Literacy.RL.11-12.2
3. Describe the town's attitude towards Janie. Describe her attitude towards the town. How does the communal dialogue help establish the town as a character? **CCSS.ELA-Literacy.RL.11-12.3**
4. On page 7, Janie tells Pheoby, "Unless you see de fur, a mink skin ain't no different from a coon hide." Based on context clues, what do you think this saying means? **CCSS.ELA-Literacy.RL.11-12.4** **CCSS.ELA-Literacy.L.11-12.4a**
5. Hurston frequently uses personification in her descriptions of the natural world. Find one example of personification from the first chapter. How does the use of figurative language impact the tone of the novel?
CCSS.ELA-Literacy.RL.11-12.4

CHAPTER TWO

1. Identify the simile that is used to describe the way that Janie views her life. Explain how this description might foreshadow Janie's future. **CCSS.ELA-Literacy.L.11-12.5a** **CCSS.ELA-Literacy.RL.11-12.4**
2. In this chapter, what do you find out about Janie's parents and early childhood? **CCSS.ELA-Literacy.RL.11-12.1**
3. What does watching the blossoming pear make Janie realize? What does she do in response to this "awakening"? Why does her action upset her grandmother? **CCSS.ELA-Literacy.RL.11-12.4**
4. Who does Nanny want Janie to marry? Why does she think this will be a good match? Why doesn't Janie agree?
CCSS.ELA-Literacy.RL.11-12.1
5. Janie's grandmother tells her that she wanted her to "pick from a higher bush and a sweeter berry." What specific dream did Janie's grandmother have for her granddaughter? When contrasted with Janie's vision of her life as a tree, what is ironic about her grandmother's words? **CCSS.ELA-Literacy.RL.11-12.6**
6. Describe Marse Robert's interaction with Nanny. What does the fact that his wife has to wait until her husband has left before she goes to see Nanny suggest about their relationship? **CCSS.ELA-Literacy.L.11-12.5**
CCSS.ELA-Literacy.RL.11-12.4
7. What name did Nanny give her daughter? What life did Nanny want for her daughter? What ended up happening to her?
CCSS.ELA-Literacy.RL.11-12.1
8. Hurston reveals the events of this chapter primarily through the use of dialogue. How does this choice impact the reader's experience of the chapter? **CCSS.ELA-Literacy.RL.11-12.5**

CHAPTER THREE

1. What did Janie hope she would discover once she was married? **CCSS.ELA-Literacy.RL.11-12.1**
2. When Nanny asks Janie if she is pregnant on page 22, Janie says, "Ah'm all right data way. Ah know 'tain't nothin' dere." What does her response suggest about her marriage? **CCSS.ELA-Literacy.L.11-12.5 CCSS.ELA-Literacy.RL.11-12.4**
3. Paraphrase Nanny's comments about "foot kissin'" and "mouf kissin'" on page 23. Do you agree with her view of courtship and marriage?
4. Contrast Janie and Nanny's views of love. How have their life experiences impacted their perspectives? **CCSS.ELA-Literacy.RL.11-12.3**
5. Consider Hurston's observation, "There is a basin in the mind where words float around on thought and thought on sound and sight. Then there is a depth of thought untouched by words, and deeper still a gulf of formless feelings untouched by thought." What do you think this means? Why do you think Hurston chose to use imagery related to water to describe thoughts and feelings? **CCSS.ELA-Literacy.RL.11-12.4 CCSS.ELA-Literacy.L.11-12.5**
6. Examine the final paragraph of the chapter. What sorts of things does Janie instinctively know? Consider the last line of the chapter: "Janie's first dream was dead, so she became a woman." How does this statement relate to Hurston's observation on the first page of the novel, "Now, women forget all those things they don't want to remember, and remember everything they don't want to forget. The dream is the truth"? **CCSS.ELA-Literacy.RL.11-12.3**

CHAPTER FOUR

1. Consider Janie's comment to her husband, "Scuse my freezolity, Mist' Killicks, but Ah don't mean to chop de first chip." What do you think the word "freezolity" means? What root words did Hurston combine to create this expression? What makes this term particularly effective? **CCSS.ELA-Literacy.L.11-12.3**
2. What is Killick's nickname for Janie? What does this suggest about his attitude towards her? What does Janie call her husband? What does this suggest about her feelings towards him? **CCSS.ELA-Literacy.RL.11-12.4**
3. Describe the circumstances of the first meeting between Janie and Joe Starks. What was Janie doing before she met him? Describe your first impression of him. **CCSS.ELA-Literacy.RL.11-12.3**
4. Analyze the figurative language that Hurston uses on page 29 to describe Janie's feelings about Joe: "Janie pulled back a long time because he did not represent sun-up and pollen and blooming trees, but he spoke for far horizon." What does this description suggest about the future of her relationship with Joe? **CCSS.ELA-Literacy.L.11-12.5a**
5. The morning after Janie talks about leaving him, how does Logan treat Janie? Why do you think he behaves this way? How does Janie respond to him? Do you think he could have done anything that would have changed her decision to leave him? **CCSS.ELA-Literacy.RL.11-12.1**
6. Consider the following passage from page 32: "The morning air was like a new dress. That made her feel the apron tied around her waist. She untied it and flung it on a low branch beside the road and walked on, picking flowers and making a bouquet." Explain why her actions are symbolic as well as literal. **CCSS.ELA-Literacy.L.11-12.5**
CCSS.ELA-Literacy.RL.11-12.3

CHAPTER FIVE

1. Describe what Joe “Jody” Starks and Janie find when they arrive in Eatonville. **CCSS.ELA-Literacy.RL.11-12.1**
2. How much land did Starks purchase? Describe what he plans to do in Eatonville. **CCSS.ELA-Literacy.RL.11-12.1**
3. What is the first thing that Starks does to improve the town? Why is this important for the local economy? **CCSS.ELA-Literacy.RL.11-12.5**
4. At the opening of the store, Tony makes a speech about Mr. and Mrs. Starks and is chided for not comparing them to “Isaac and Rebecca at the well.” Look up the story of Isaac and Rebecca and explain why this would or would not have been an appropriate comparison. **CCSS.ELA-Literacy.W.11-12.7 CCSS.ELA-Literacy.W.11-12.9**
5. How does Joe respond when the townspeople ask Janie to make a little speech? What does his response suggest about his attitude towards Janie? Why is it symbolically significant that she views his response as “taking the bloom off things”? **CCSS.ELA-Literacy.RL.11-12.1 CCSS.ELA-Literacy.RL.11-12.4**
6. After he opens the store, what is the second improvement Joe Starks makes in Eatonville? Why is this an important symbol for the town? How do Joe’s remarks on page 45 demonstrate hubris? **CCSS.ELA-Literacy.RL.11-12.1**
7. Explain why Janie’s role as the wife of the mayor makes her feel “cold and lonely”? How do the townspeople treat her? **CCSS.ELA-Literacy.RL.11-12.3**
8. At the end of the chapter the narrator remarks that, “The town had a basketful of feelings good and bad about Joe’s positions and possessions, but none had the temerity to challenge him.” Explain the reasons behind both the good and bad feelings that the town holds regarding Joe. Which do you think he most deserves? Explain your answer. **CCSS.ELA-Literacy.RL.11-12.3**

CHAPTER SIX

1. Who are the “mule-talkers”? Why do they tease Matt Bonner about his mule? **CCSS.ELA-Literacy.RL.11-12.1**
2. What happened that caused Joe to tell Janie to wear a head-rag while she works? How does she feel about wearing it? Do you think it would have made a difference if Joe had told her that he was jealous? **CCSS.ELA-Literacy.RL.11-12.3**
3. What does Joe overhear Janie say about Matt Bonner’s mule? What does he do after he hears her? How does Janie respond to his actions? **CCSS.ELA-Literacy.RL.11-12.3**
4. Describe the tales that people tell about the mule after Joe Starks emancipates it. Why do you think the mule captures their imaginations the way it does? **CCSS.ELA-Literacy.RL.11-12.4**
5. Describe the “dragging out” ceremony that the town holds for the mule. How does the ceremony fit the description from page 51 of the townspeople’s stories being a “crayon enlargement of life”? What reason does Joe give for not allowing Janie to attend the ceremony? Do you think he had a right to make her stay at the store? **CCSS.ELA-Literacy.RL.11-12.3 CCSS.ELA-Literacy.RL.11-12.6**
6. After the townspeople complete the dragging-out ceremony, Hurston briefly shifts the narrative focus to a community of buzzards (pages 61-62) and describes the buzzards’ ceremony over the dead mule. What is the significance of this passage in terms of the structure of the novel? How does it contribute to the tone of the book? **CCSS.ELA-Literacy.RL.11-12.4 CCSS.ELA-Literacy.RL.11-12.5**
7. On page 63 Hurston writes, “Janie took the easy way away from a fuss. She didn’t change her mind but she agreed with her mouth.” Do you believe she did the right thing? How does “agreeing with your mouth” but not with your heart impact a relationship? **CCSS.ELA-Literacy.RL.11-12.1**
8. Examine Sam’s use of the word “questionizin” on page 63. Vernacular language, like figurative language, often has nuanced meanings. How is the meaning of the word “questioning” subtly different from “questionizin”? Pay attention to root words and suffixes to help you determine the meaning. **CCSS.ELA-Literacy.L.11-12.3**

9. Based on context clues, draw a picture of the “scoundrel-beast” that Joe says he saw at Hall’s filling station (page 66).
CCSS.ELA-Literacy.L.11-12.5
10. On page 69, Hurston gives the following description of Mrs. Bogle: “You saw a fluttering fan before her face and magnolia blooms and sleepy lakes under the moonlight when she walked.” Using this passage as a mentor sentence, compose a description that uses figurative language to create a similar “thought picture” of someone you know.
CCSS.ELA-Literacy.L.11-12.3
11. What does it mean to say, “The spirit of the marriage left the bedroom and took to living in the parlor. It was there to shake hands whenever company came to visit, but it never went back inside the bedroom again”? What causes this change in Jody and Janie’s marriage? **CCSS.ELA-Literacy.L.11-12.5a**
12. At the end of chapter six, Janie speaks up and gives her opinion about a conversation that the men are having on the porch of the store. What are the men talking about before she interjects? What does she tell them about women?
CCSS.ELA-Literacy.RL.11-12.2

CHAPTER SEVEN

1. A dynamic character is a character that changes. Describe how Janie has changed by this point in the novel. Why do you think Hurston chose the metaphor, “She was a rut in the road,” to describe Janie at age 34?
CCSS.ELA-Literacy.RL.11-12.3 CCSS.ELA-Literacy.RL.11-12.4
2. What physical signs suggest that Joe is getting old and may be sick? **CCSS.ELA-Literacy.RL.11-12.1**
3. How does Joe insult Janie? What does she say about him to retaliate? **CCSS.ELA-Literacy.RL.11-12.1**
4. Why is Janie’s insult particularly offensive to Joe? **CCSS.ELA-Literacy.RL.11-12.6**

CHAPTER EIGHT

1. Consider the language in the statement from page 81, “But the stillness was the sleep of swords.” What are the connotations of this description? How does the use of alliteration increase the effectiveness of the language?
CCSS.ELA-Literacy.L.11-12.5a
2. What is Joe implying when he refuses to eat the soup that Janie makes for him? **CCSS.ELA-Literacy.RL.11-12.6**
3. What rumor are people spreading about Janie (page 82)? **CCSS.ELA-Literacy.RL.11-12.1**
4. Examine the descriptions of Death and Rumor on page 84. What forms of figurative language does Hurston use? How do her choices impact the tone of the chapter? **CCSS.ELA-Literacy.L.11-12.5a**
5. Janie uses the term “multiplied cockroach” to describe the sham doctor that Joe hires. What are the connotations of calling someone a “multiplied cockroach”? How is it different from simply being called a “cockroach”?
CCSS.ELA-Literacy.L.11-12.5b
6. When Janie confronts Joe on his deathbed, she tells him, “And now you got tuh die to find out dat you got tuh pacify somebody besides yo’self if you wants any love and sympathy in did world. You ain’t tried tuh pacify nobody but yo’self” (Pages 86-87). Why do you think Janie uses the word “pacify” here? **CCSS.ELA-Literacy.L.11-12.5a**
7. How do you feel about Janie’s final confrontation with Joe and her reaction to his death? Was she was right to confront him? Do you feel sympathetic towards Janie? Do you feel sympathetic towards Joe? **CCSS.ELA-Literacy.RL.11-12.1**
CCSS.ELA-Literacy.RL.11-12.3

CHAPTER NINE

1. The figure of speech, “Janie starched and ironed her face” is used on both page 87 and 88. Explain the connotative meanings of this phrase. A few lines later, Hurston writes, “She sent her face to Joe’s funeral, and herself went rollicking with the springtime across the world.” Explain how this observation helps explain why Janie needs to “starch and iron” her face. **CCSS.ELA-Literacy.L.11-12.5a CCSS.ELA-Literacy.L.11-12.5b**
2. What outward change does Janie make after her husband’s death? **CCSS.ELA-Literacy.RL.11-12.1**
3. Describe the realization that Janie has about her mother and grandmother. How are Janie’s values different from Nanny’s? **CCSS.ELA-Literacy.RL.11-12.2**
4. On page 90, Hurston offers a variation on a creation myth. Compare this story to the story of Adam and Eve and describe their similarities and differences. **CCSS.ELA-Literacy.w.11-12.7 CCSS.ELA-Literacy.W.11-12.9**
5. Once she becomes a financially independent widow, how do men treat Janie? How does she respond to her suitors? **CCSS.ELA-Literacy.RL.11-12.1**

CHAPTER TEN

1. Find all of the words that are used to physically describe Tea Cake. Compare these to a photo of the actor Michael Ealy, who played Tea Cake in the film adaptation of the novel. Explain why Ealy does or does not match Hurston’s description of Tea Cake. **CCSS.ELA-Literacy.RL.W-12.7 CCSS.ELA-Literacy.W.11-12.9**
2. Explain why it is symbolically significant that Tea Cake invites Janie to play checkers and teaches her the how to play the game. How does this make him a foil for Joe Starks? **CCSS.ELA-Literacy.RL.11-12.3**
3. How does Janie respond to Tea Cake’s flirtation? Why do you think she responds the way she does? **CCSS.ELA-Literacy.RL.11-12.3**

CHAPTER ELEVEN

1. Before she sees him again, what are Janie’s concerns regarding Tea Cake? How does she intend to respond to him if he comes back? How does she end up responding? **CCSS.ELA-Literacy.RL.11-12.1**
2. Why is it significant that Janie invites Tea Cake to sit with her on the front porch? What does he do with her on their first night time “date”? **CCSS.ELA-Literacy.RL.11-12.3**
3. What reason does Hezekiah give for warning Janie to be careful around Tea Cake? **CCSS.ELA-Literacy.RL.11-12.1**
4. What do Janie and Tea Cake do on their second date? How does he make Janie feel? How does she respond to his declaration of love? **CCSS.ELA-Literacy.RL.11-12.3**
5. Consider Janie’s description on page 106 of Tea Cake as being a “bee to a blossom – a pear tree blossom in spring.” How does this idea fit with Janie’s dream at the beginning of the novel? **CCSS.ELA-Literacy.L.11-12.5a CCSS.ELA-Literacy.RL.11-12.4**
6. What does Tea Cake do to prove to Janie that he is sincere in his declaration of love? How does she respond to him? **CCSS.ELA-Literacy.RL.11-12.1**
7. After Tea Cake leaves, why does Janie begin to doubt him? How does he reassure her? **CCSS.ELA-Literacy.RL.11-12.1**

CHAPTER TWELVE

1. Once the town “begins to notice things” about Janie and Tea Cake, how do they respond? What specific criticisms do they have? Which of their criticisms are particularly hypocritical? **CCSS.ELA-Literacy.RL.11-12.6**
2. Based on context clues, what do you think the phrase “class off” means (page 112)? **CCSS.ELA-Literacy.L.11-12.4a**
3. Why does Pheoby come to visit Janie? List the concerns that she has about Tea Cake and explain how Janie counters each of her friend’s arguments. **CCSS.ELA-Literacy.RL.11-12.3**
4. What has Janie decided to do about her relationship with Tea Cake? Do you think she’s making the right decision? Explain your answer. **CCSS.ELA-Literacy.RL.11-12.1**

CHAPTER THIRTEEN

1. Describe Tea Cake and Janie’s reunion in Jacksonville. **CCSS.ELA-Literacy.RL.11-12.1**
2. What secret does Janie keep from Tea Cake? Why does she keep this secret? **CCSS.ELA-Literacy.RL.11-12.1**
3. What causes Janie to begin to think about Annie Tyler and Who Flung? After reading Annie Tyler’s story, explain why Pheoby mentioned her as a warning to Janie. **CCSS.ELA-Literacy.RL.11-12.5**
4. When Tea Cake returns, what story does he tell Janie about where he’s been? Do you think he is telling her the complete truth? Why or why not? **CCSS.ELA-Literacy.RL.11-12.6**
5. What reason does Tea Cake give for not taking Janie with him? How does she respond? **CCSS.ELA-Literacy.RL.11-12.1**
6. What “secret” does Tea Cake reveal about himself? How is he planning to get back the two hundred dollars he took from Janie? What happens to him? **CCSS.ELA-Literacy.RL.11-12.1**
7. Why do you think Janie decides to tell Tea Cake about the money she has in the bank? How does he respond when he finds out how much money she has? **CCSS.ELA-Literacy.RL.11-12.3**
8. What is “the muck” (page 128)? Why is Tea Cake going to take Janie there? **CCSS.ELA-Literacy.L.11-12.4a**

CHAPTER FOURTEEN

1. Where do Janie and Tea Cake end up living once they get to the Everglades? How close are they to Lake Okechobee? **CCSS.ELA-Literacy.RL.11-12.1**
2. What does Tea Cake teach Janie to do while they are waiting for the beans to grow? **CCSS.ELA-Literacy.RL.11-12.1**
3. Describe the atmosphere of the Glades once people start arriving to work the harvest. **CCSS.ELA-Literacy.RL.11-12.3**
4. Why does Janie start working with Tea Cake? Describe her attitude towards joining him in the fields. **CCSS.ELA-Literacy.RL.11-12.3**
5. Describe the tone and mood of this chapter. What specific details help create the tone and mood? **CCSS.ELA-Literacy.RL.11-12.4**

CHAPTER FIFTEEN

1. Explain how Janie “learns to get jealous” and how Tea Cake reassures her. Do you think she is right to be jealous? How would you have handled a similar situation? **CCSS.ELA-Literacy.RL.11-12.1** **CCSS.ELA-Literacy.W.11-12.7**

CHAPTER SIXTEEN

1. Why do Janie and Tea Cake decide to stay in the Everglades after the season ends? **CCSS.ELA-Literacy.RL.11-12.1**
2. Describe Mrs. Turner's physical appearance. What do you think it means on page 139 when Hurston calls her "a milky sort of woman that belonged to child-bed"? **CCSS.ELA-Literacy.L.11-12.5**
3. Why does Mrs. Turner seek out Janie for friendship? Why doesn't she approve of Tea Cake? **CCSS.ELA-Literacy.RL.11-12.3**
4. Explain Mrs. Turner's feelings about her racial identity. Although both Janie and Mrs. Turner have biracial ancestry, contrast Mrs. Turner's attitudes about race with Janie's. **CCSS.ELA-Literacy.RL.11-12.6**
5. Do you believe that Hurston intended readers view Mrs. Turner sympathetically or not? Explain your answer. **CCSS.ELA-Literacy.RL.11-12.3**

CHAPTER SEVENTEEN

1. Why does Tea Cake become jealous? How does he handle his jealousy? **CCSS.ELA-Literacy.RL.11-12.1**
2. Based on the context, what do you think "getting their knots charged" is a slang expression for doing (page 149)? **CCSS.ELA-Literacy.L.11-12.4a**
3. What do Tea Cake's friends fight over? How does the fight end? **CCSS.ELA-Literacy.RL.11-12.1**
4. This is the only chapter in the novel where Janie is not present. Why do you think Hurston includes this chapter in the book? How does it help develop the character of Tea Cake? **CCSS.ELA-Literacy.RL.11-12.5**
CCSS.ELA-Literacy.RL.11-12.3

CHAPTER EIGHTEEN

1. Why do the Seminole Indians say they are leaving Belle Glade? Why don't the residents believe they're right? **CCSS.ELA-Literacy.RL.11-12.1**
2. Describe the signs that indicate a hurricane is coming. **CCSS.ELA-Literacy.RL.11-12.3**
3. Who invites Janie and Tea Cake to leave with them? Why don't they go? **CCSS.ELA-Literacy.RL.11-12.1**
4. Describe the mood at Tea Cake and Janie's house the night before the storm. What specific details help create that mood? **CCSS.ELA-Literacy.RL.11-12.4**
5. What type of figurative language does Hurston use to describe Lake Okechobee? **CCSS.ELA-Literacy.L.11-12.5**
6. Which description(s) of the storm do you find particularly effective or evocative? **CCSS.ELA-Literacy.RL.11-12.4**
7. Describe the ordeal that Tea Cake and Janie go through as they struggle to survive the storm and its aftermath. How does Tea Cake get hurt? **CCSS.ELA-Literacy.RL.11-12.1**

CHAPTER NINETEEN

1. Analyze the imagery used to describe "Him-with-the-square-toes" (page 168). What do you think Hurston is describing/personifying? **CCSS.ELA-Literacy.L.11-12.5a** **CCSS.ELA-Literacy.RL.11-12.4**
2. Why does Tea Cake end up helping gather and bury the dead? What does he find out about the different way that black and white bodies are being treated? **CCSS.ELA-Literacy.RL.11-12.1**
3. Why do Tea Cake and Janie go back to Belle Glade? What do they find out about their friends when they return? **CCSS.ELA-Literacy.RL.11-12.1**
4. How much time passes between the hurricane and the onset of Tea Cake's illness? What are his first symptoms? How rapidly does his condition deteriorate? Which symptom is particularly alarming to Janie? **CCSS.ELA-Literacy.RL.11-12.1**

5. At one time, the disease Rabies was also known as hydrophobia. Look up the symptoms of Rabies and the definition of hydrophobia and explain why it was an appropriate name. **CCSS.ELA-Literacy.W.11-12.7 CCSS.ELA-Literacy.L.11-12.3**
6. What does the doctor say Tea Cake's prognosis is? Look up the treatment for Rabies. Have advancements been made in the way the disease is treated and diagnosed? **CCSS.ELA-Literacy.W.11-12.7 CCSS.ELA-Literacy.W.11-12.9**
7. What does the doctor want to do with Tea Cake? **CCSS.ELA-Literacy.RL.11-12.1**
8. Examine Janie's appeal to God. What does it mean when she realizes that "God would do less than He had in His heart" (page 178)? **CCSS.ELA-Literacy.RL.11-12.4**
9. In his delirium, what does Tea Cake become jealous about? What does he accuse Janie of doing? What does Janie find under his pillow? Why does it frighten her? **CCSS.ELA-Literacy.RL.11-12.1**
10. Describe Tea Cake's death. **CCSS.ELA-Literacy.RL.11-12.1**
11. At Janie's trial, who asks to testify against her? Who testifies on her behalf? What does she say in her own defense? **CCSS.ELA-Literacy.RL.11-12.1**
12. What instructions does the judge give the jury before they begin deliberations? Why do you think he tells them "there is no middle course"(page 188)? What is their verdict? **CCSS.ELA-Literacy.RL.11-12.1**
13. Explain the meaning of the epithet Janie uses to describe Tea Cake: "son of Evening Sun". **CCSS.ELA-Literacy.L.11-12.5a CCSS.ELA-Literacy.RL.11-12.4**
14. How is the attitude of the town different at Tea Cake's funeral than it was at the funeral of Joe Starks? How is Janie different? What does the line, "she was too busy feeling grief to dress like grief"(page 189) reveal about how her character has changed? **CCSS.ELA-Literacy.L.11-12.5a CCSS.ELA-Literacy.RL.11-12.3**

CHAPTER TWENTY

1. Why does Janie leave Belle Glade? What does she take with her "for remembrance" (page 191)? **CCSS.ELA-Literacy.RL.11-12.1**
2. Explain what Janie means on page 191 when she tells Pheoby, "Ah done been tuh de horizon and back and now Ah kin set heah in mah house and live by comparisons." **CCSS.ELA-Literacy.RL.11-12.2**
3. How has Janie's attitude about the opinion of the townspeople changed? **CCSS.ELA-Literacy.RL.11-12.2**
4. Explain how Janie's use of the word "consolate" (page 192) makes grammatical sense even though it is not Standard American English. **CCSS.ELA-Literacy.L.11-12.3**
5. On page 192 Janie says there are "two things everybody's got tuh do fuh theyselves." What are they? What do you think Janie discovers about them? **CCSS.ELA-Literacy.RL.11-12.2**
6. Describe the mood of the end of the book. What has Janie lost? What has she found? **CCSS.ELA-Literacy.RL.11-12.4 CCSS.ELA-Literacy.RL.11-12.2**

Writing and Discussion Prompts

All writing prompts address the following standards and are organized by genre:

CCSS.ELA-Literacy.W.11-12.2.4 CCSS.ELA-Literacy.W.11-12.2.5 CCSS.ELA-Literacy.W.11-12.2.9

ARGUMENTATION PROMPTS

CCSS.ELA-Literacy.W.11-12.2.1 (a-e) Write arguments to support claims in an analysis of substantive topics or texts, using valid reasoning and relevant and sufficient evidence.

1. Examine Hurston's use of point of view. How does the way she structures the novel with the narrative frame of Janie telling her story to Pheoby impact the reader's experience and help develop theme? How would the effect of the novel be different if it were written from a first-person point of view? **CCSS.ELA-Literacy.RL.11-12.5**
2. The novel's title is taken from a line describing the hurricane that hits Belle Glade: "They sat in company with the others in other shanties, their eyes straining against crude walls and their souls asking if He meant to measure their puny might against His. They seemed to be staring at the dark, but their eyes were watching God" (Page 160). How does Hurston develop the idea of God? What role does God play in the world of the novel? **CCSS.ELA-Literacy.RL.11-12.2**
3. One of the universal themes of literature is the idea that children suffer because of the mistakes of an earlier generation. Examine the development of this theme in *Their Eyes Were Watching God* by analyzing the story that Nanny tells about her life (pages 14-20). Discuss Nanny's interactions with white men and women. How did growing up in slavery impact her worldview? How has her past impacted her relationship with her daughter and granddaughter? **CCSS.ELA-Literacy.RL.11-12.3**
4. Consider Janie's description of the day she realized that she was not white (pages 8-9) and compare this description to Zora Neal Hurston's essay, "[How It Feels to be Colored Me.](#)" In both texts, the speaker's explanation of her awareness of race refers to more than an awareness of skin tone. What does Hurston mean when she writes about "realizing she was colored"? What does Janie become aware of when she views the photo? How would you describe Hurston's view of racial identity? **CCSS.ELA-Literacy.RL.11-12.9 CCSS.ELA-Literacy.W.11-12.9a**
5. *Their Eyes Were Watching God* has been criticized for what some viewed as a negative and stereotypical portrayal of African Americans. Examine Hurston's choice to use vernacular English. Is there any validity to criticisms of the novel's use of language? **CCSS.ELA-Literacy.RL.11-12.4**
6. Two of the interconnected themes in the novel are the search for identity and the individual in opposition to society. Use the following quote from page 77 as a starting point for the exploration of these themes: "Then one day she sat and watched the shadow of herself going about tending store and prostrating itself before Jody, while all the time she herself sat under a shady tree with the wind blowing through her hair and her clothes." Throughout the novel, what causes Janie to separate her exterior life from her interior life? How does she reconcile this conflict? **CCSS.ELA-Literacy.RL.11-12.2**
7. Compare the description of Janie's response to Joe's death to the short story "Story of an Hour" by Kate Chopin (published 1894) or Chopin's novel, *The Awakening* to *Their Eyes Were Watching God*. What do both texts reveal about women's lives in the very late 19th and early 20th century? Although the protagonists in the novels are from different racial and socio-economic groups, what do they have in common? **CCSS.ELA-Literacy.RL.11-12.9 CCSS.ELA-Literacy.W.11-12.9a**
8. Compare the novel to its film adaptation. What aspects of the novel do you think the film handled well? What criticisms do you have of the film? **CCSS.ELA-Literacy.RL.11-12.7**

EXPLANATORY PROMPTS

CCSS.ELA-Literacy.W.11-12.2.2 (a-f) Write informative/explanatory texts to examine and convey complex ideas, concepts, and information clearly and accurately through the effective selection, organization, and analysis of content.

1. Consider the following lines from the opening of the book: “Now, women forget all those things they don’t want to remember, and remember everything they don’t want to forget. The dream is the truth. Then they act and do things accordingly.” Explain how this statement is true in Janie’s life. **CCSS.ELA-Literacy.RL.11-12.3**
2. On page 9, Janie says, “Dey all uster call me Alphabet ‘cause so many people had none named me different names.” Examine the use of names in the novel. What do the character’s names reveal about identity? How do names reflect a character’s culture, socioeconomic position, and/or personality? Pay particular attention to characters that are called more than one name throughout the novel. **CCSS.ELA-Literacy.RL.11-12.4**
3. The novel contains several scenes with men talking in an exaggerated and humorous way about women. Examine these scenes (pages 36; 67-69) and explain what they reveal about the cultural context of male and female roles. **CCSS.ELA-Literacy.RL.11-12.6**
4. On page 39, Coker observes, “Us colored folks is too envious of one ‘nother. Dat’s how come us don’t git no further than us do. Us talks about de white man keeping us down! Shucks! He don’t have tuh. Us keeps our own selves down.” Throughout the novel, how does envy impact Janie’s life? **CCSS.ELA-Literacy.RL.11-12.1**
5. Hurston makes the following observation on page 51: “When the people sat around on the porch and passed around the pictures of their thoughts for others to look at and see, it was nice. The fact that they thought pictures were always crayon enlargements of life made it even nicer to listen to.” As a folklorist and anthropologist, Hurston was interested in storytelling and oral tradition. Examine the role that storytelling plays in her novel. **CCSS.ELA-Literacy.RL.11-12.5**
6. The image of the road is a universal symbol in literature. Analyze and explain the significance of the road in *Their Eyes Were Watching God*. **CCSS.ELA-Literacy.RL.11-12.4**
7. Explore Hurston’s use of Biblical allusion in *Their Eyes Were Watching God*. How does an understanding of these allusions impact the reader’s understanding of the novel? **CCSS.ELA-Literacy.RL.11-12.4**
8. Analyze the structure of *Their Eyes Were Watching God*, paying particular attention to way Hurston begins and ends each chapter. **CCSS.ELA-Literacy.RL.11-12.5**

NARRATIVE PROMPTS

CCSS.ELA-Literacy.W.11-12.2.3 (a-e) Write narratives to develop real or imagined experiences or events using effective technique, well-chosen details, and well-structured event sequences.

1. After Nanny tells Janie about her life, she concludes with a deeply resonant statement: “Put me down easy, Janie, Ah’m a cracked plate.” This metaphor reinforces the story that Nanny has told and provides further insight into her character. Using Hurston’s text as your guide, compose a 3-5 page narrative account of your own life story, focusing on two or three events that have been the most significant. Conclude your narrative with a metaphor that summarizes your story.
CCSS.ELA-Literacy.L.11-12.5
2. On page 76 Hurston describes Janie’s isolation and comments, “She didn’t read books so she didn’t know that she was the world and the heavens boiled down to a drop.” Compose a personal narrative that explores a time reading a book that helped you see yourself more clearly. What was it about the book that made you feel connected? What insights have you had about yourself as a result of reading literature? **CCSS.ELA-Literacy.L.11-12.3**
3. As part of a unit on American Literature, consider the structure of *Their Eyes Were Watching God* in contrast to William Faulkner’s *As I Lay Dying*. Using Faulkner’s novel as a guide, rewrite one of the chapters from Hurston’s novel from the first person point of view of a character other than Janie. **CCSS.ELA-Literacy.RL.11-12.9a**
4. On page 145 Hurston meditates on Mrs. Turner’s worship of the “god” of Caucasian characteristics. Can you relate to Hurston’s description of gods and idols? Do you idolize anything? If so, what toll has it taken on your life? Compose a personal narrative that explores your experience with idolizing something. How did it impact your view of yourself? How did it impact your relationship with others? **CCSS.ELA-Literacy.L.11-12.3**

QUESTIONS FOR CLASS DEBATE/SOCRATIC SEMINARS

Initiate and participate effectively in a range of collaborative discussions (one-on-one, in groups, and teacher-led) with diverse partners on grades 11–12 topics, texts, and issues, building on others’ ideas and expressing their own clearly and persuasively.

1. In the Foreword of the novel, Edwidge Danticant mentions that her college class debated the question of “Why Janie let Tea Cake hit her?” (xiv). Chapter Seventeen, which describes Tea Cake and his friends talking about hitting their wives and girlfriends, is problematic for some readers. Why do you think Hurston included this chapter? Debate whether or not *Their Eyes Were Watching God* condones domestic violence. **CCSS.ELA-Literacy.RL.11-12.1a**
2. On pages 64-65, Sam and Walter argue over whether nature or caution keeps a man from getting burned on a red-hot stove. Summarize both sides of their argument and hold your own class debate on the question?
CCSS.ELA-Literacy.RL.11-12.1a
3. Is *Their Eyes Were Watching God* a feminist novel? Is Janie a strong female character? **CCSS.ELA-Literacy.RL.11-12.1a**
4. What makes Janie and Tea Cake’s relationship different from her first two marriages? What is it about this relationship that allows “her soul to crawl out from its hiding place” (page 128)? **CCSS.ELA-Literacy.RL.11-12.1a**
5. Examine the description of Janie and Joe’s relationship on pages 71-72 and trace the breakdown of their marriage. At what point did things start to fall apart? What role did each partner play? **CCSS.ELA-Literacy.RL.11-12.1a**
6. Watch *Beasts of the Southern Wild* and compare the film’s themes and emphasis on folklore to *Their Eyes Were Watching God*. **CCSS.ELA-Literacy.RL.11-12.1a**
7. What statement do you think *Their Eyes Were Watching God* makes about race and prejudice?
CCSS.ELA-Literacy.RL.11-12.1a

Research Topics

CCSS.ELA-Literacy.W.11-12.8 Gather relevant information from multiple authoritative print and digital sources, using advanced searches effectively; assess the strengths and limitations of each source in terms of the task, purpose, and audience; integrate information into the text selectively to maintain the flow of ideas, avoiding plagiarism and overreliance on any one source and following a standard format for citation.

1. On pages 36-37 the reader finds out that the town of Eatonville was established when a man named Captain Eaton gave fifty acres of land to start a town for African Americans. Research the history of Eatonville, Florida and Zora Neale Hurston's connection to the town and create a multimedia presentation about Eatonville that draws information from both primary and secondary sources. **CCSS.ELA-Literacy.SL.11-12.5 CCSS.ELA-Literacy.W.11-12.6**
2. The first thing that Joe Starks does to improve Eatonville is to open a store. (His explanation of why the town needs a store can be found on page 40.) How important are local businesses to an economy? Research the impact that locally owned businesses have on a city and create a multimedia advertisement that promotes shopping locally and highlights a specific local business. **CCSS.ELA-Literacy.SL.11-12.5 CCSS.ELA-Literacy.W.11-12.6**
3. Two of the most significant male African-American writers that were Hurston's contemporaries are Richard Wright and Ralph Ellison. Read either Wright's *Native Son* or Ellison's *Invisible Man* and contrast it with *Their Eyes Were Watching God*. Pay attention to the themes, language, character development, and author's purpose in each of the texts. Using both primary and secondary sources, develop an argument paper that thoughtfully examines the historic controversy over Hurston's inclusion in the African-American literary canon. **CCSS.ELA-Literacy.RL.11-12.9a CCSS.ELA-Literacy.W.11-12.9**
4. When Tea Cake is sent to help bury the victims of the hurricane, he is told, on page 171, "They makin' coffins fuh all de white folks. 'Tain't nothin' but cheap pine, but dat's better'n nothin'. Don't dump white folks in de hole jus' so." Research the hurricane that hit West Palm Beach in 1928. How were white and black victims treated in the hurricane's aftermath? What has been done since then to memorialize the black victims of the hurricane? Compare the situation in 1928 to Hurricane Katrina or Hurricane Sandy. Is there still inequality in the way that people of different socioeconomic or racial groups are treated in the aftermath of a storm? **CCSS.ELA-Literacy.W.11-12.9**
5. Although the residents of Belle Glade are warned to evacuate before the hurricane, many of them choose to stay. Research a specific area of America's coastline and the dangers that a hurricane would pose to this area. Create a public service announcement geared for a specific local audience that tells them how to prepare for hurricane season and gives them persuasive reasons to evacuate if necessary. **CCSS.ELA-Literacy.SL.11-12.5 CCSS.ELA-Literacy.W.11-12.6**
6. Janie and Tea Cake befriend a group of Bahaman workers and interact with Seminole Indians when they are in Belle Glade. Research the history either of these groups and their connection to the history of South Florida, specifically Palm Beach County. Which minority groups have been significant to the local history of your own community? Prepare a presentation that celebrates the history and contributions of a specific minority group in your local area. **CCSS.ELA-Literacy.SL.11-12.4**
7. Research the life of Zora Neale Hurston and examine the autobiographical aspects of *Their Eyes Were Watching God*. Use both primary and secondary sources to conduct your research. **CCSS.ELA-Literacy.W.11-12.9**
8. During the Harlem Renaissance, Zora Neale Hurston wrote a number of plays for black vaudeville theater. Research her theatrical works and examine her use of dialogue and character development in *Their Eyes Were Watching God* in the context of her work as a playwright. **CCSS.ELA-Literacy.W.11-12.9 CCSS.ELA-Literacy.RL.11-12.9**
9. Research the literary movement of naturalism and read at least one text associated with this movement. Using both primary and secondary sources, discuss whether or not *Their Eyes Were Watching God* is an example of naturalism. **CCSS.ELA-Literacy.W.11-12.9 CCSS.ELA-Literacy.RL.11-12.9a**
10. Research both feminist literary criticism and African-American literary criticism and present a persuasive speech arguing that *Their Eyes Were Watching God* is a better choice for inclusion in either a course on women's literature or a course on African-American literature. **CCSS.ELA-Literacy.W.11-12.4**

The Works of Zora Neale Hurston

[*The Complete Stories*](#)

[*Dust Tracks on a Road: An Autobiography*](#)

[*Every Tongue Got to Confess: Negro Folk-tales from the Gulf States*](#)

[*Jonah's Gourd Vine: A Novel*](#)

[*Moses, Man of the Mountain: A Novel*](#)

[*Mule Bone: A Comedy of Negro Life*](#) co-written with Langston Hughes

[*Mules and Men*](#)

[*Seraph on the Suwanee: A Novel*](#)

[*Tell My Horse: Voodoo and Life in Haiti and Jamaica*](#)

[*Their Eyes Were Watching God*](#)

Other Titles of Interest

Common Core State Standards ask you to help your students build knowledge and critical thinking skills through the use of fiction and nonfiction texts. Here are several titles that will allow your students to compare and contrast multiple points of view on specific subjects and themes related to *Their Eyes Were Watching God*.

African-American Writers

[*Selected Poems of Gwendolyn Brooks*](#) by Gwendolyn Brooks

[*Three Negro Classics: Up From Slavery*](#) by Booker T. Washington, [*The Souls of Black Folks*](#) by W.E.B. Dubois, [*The Autobiography of a Colored Man*](#) by James Weldon Johnson

[*Wench*](#) by Dolen Perkins-Valdez

[*Native Son*](#) by Richard Wright

[*Black Boy*](#) by Richard Wright

Zora Neale Hurston's Life and Times

[*Dust Tracks on a Road: An Autobiography*](#) by Zora Neale Hurston

[*Speak, So You Can Speak Again: The Life of Zora Neale Hurston*](#) by Lucy Hurston

[*Wrapped in Rainbows: The Life of Zora Neale Hurston*](#) by Valerie Boyd

[*Black Cloud: The Great Hurricane of 1928*](#) by Eliot Kleinberg

[*Miss Anne in Harlem: The White Women of the Black Renaissance*](#) by Carla Kaplan

About This Guide's Author

Amy Jurskis is the author of a number of teaching guides, including *The Immortal Life of Henrietta Lacks* by Rebecca Skloot and *American Tapestry* by Rachel Swarns. She holds a B.A. in English from the University of Georgia and a MAT from Agnes Scott College. A former department chair for language arts in a title one public school in Atlanta, she currently serves as a chairperson of curriculum and English teacher at Oxbridge Academy of the Palm Beaches.