

Journal Prompts for *Their Eyes Were Watching God*

Directions: Choose ONE of the following prompts to complete for the selected chapter. Please type your response in MLA format. Use as much detail as possible.

Chapter 1 Questions: Select quotations from the text that support your answers.

1. Hurston begins the book with an extended metaphor. What are the dreams of men? How are they different from the dreams of women? Who doesn't get disappointed?
2. Janie has come back to town after doing what and to whom? (Pay attention to and remember their description.)
3. What are the porch-sitters compared to? How are they characterized? What can you infer from that description?
4. The first two pages are loaded with figurative language, as though Hurston was writing poetry in book form. What is the effect of this? Is it hard to understand? What is the effect of having to work a little harder to understand all the layers of her opening pages?
5. Pay attention to porches. What is the function of the porch in this chapter?
6. The author makes a big deal about Janie's black *rope* of hair. This metaphor is a central image in the book. What might Janie's hair symbolize? Follow it through the book.
7. Hurston is careful to give us many of the particulars of Janie's life since she left this town. What do we know about her?
8. In the last line of the first chapter, Hurston uses a metaphor. What is it and what is its effect on the mood of the story?
9. Briefly discuss the *voice* in this book. Hurston switches from dialect to narrative prose. It is difficult to read at first, but it also has some benefits. Discuss both, as well as techniques which can be used to make it easier to read.

Chapter 2 Questions: Select quotations from the text that support your answers.

1. Janie's life is a "great tree in leaf." What does this image convey?
2. What can you infer about Janie from the descriptions of her early life?
3. What can you infer about Nanny from her diligent pursuit of land and a home?
4. What does the pear tree represent, and how does Hurston extend this metaphor and symbol?
5. Janie's scene with the pear tree is gentle and lovely. Compare this to the description of Nanny as a different kind of tree. Discuss the description of Nanny and how the different symbols affect you.
6. Compare Nanny's vision of the white man to her vision of the role of the black woman. Define and explain the difference and the reasons for those differences.
7. Hurston's use of imagery is powerful. What does she mean when she says, "Us colored folks is branches without roots"?
8. Here is another powerful image: Why does Nanny say she is a "cracked plate"? What is Janie's response? What does Nanny mean by this?

Chapter 3 Questions: Select quotations from the text that support your answers.

1. Why does Hurston start the chapter, "There are years that ask question and years that answer"? What do you think she is going to do in this chapter?
2. Discuss Nanny's attitude toward love? What can you infer about her character from this? And why is love a "prong" that black women get "hung on"?
3. Why is Nanny so sold on Logan Killicks? What is the impact of his having a house, sixty acres, and the only organ in town?
4. Describe the tone surrounding Nanny's death?

Chapter 4 Questions: Select quotations from the text that support your answers.

1. What can you infer about Janie and Logan's marriage from the mule-buying episode?
2. Again, Janie's hair is a central image in the book. Start tracking when it is mentioned. What is its purpose?
3. Why does Hurston *repeat* Joe's "big voice" wish? What type of character is she building? What kind of characterization is this?
4. Look at the imagery surrounding Janie and Joe's meeting: If Joe does not "represent sun-up and pollen and blooming trees, but he spoke for far horizon," why does Janie go with him? What changed, if anything? What is the tone here?
5. What does the apron symbolize?
6. How does Hurston use the porch at the end of this chapter?

Chapter 5 Questions: Select quotations from the text that support your answers.

1. What are your predictions for Janie's new marriage? How does it differ from her first? How is it similar?

2. Describe Lee Cocker and Amos Hicks. Discuss the imagery of “sitting on their shoulder blades?” What can you infer about them?
3. How would you describe Amos’ and Lee’s purpose in the novel so far? How are they characterized?
4. Joe is the king of the porch in this chapter. (Once again, note the porch.) What is Janie doing while Joe entertains the crowd? What is he talking about, and how is he talking?
5. What is Joe’s reaction when Amos and Lee find him? What can you infer about Joe? About Amos and Lee?
6. Biblical allusion #1: What is the purpose of using the allusion to Isaac and Rebecca?
7. Discuss the characterization of Jody and Janie’s marriage. Why doesn’t he let her speak on the porch and what does Janie do? What can you infer about their marriage?
8. Biblical allusion #2: Jody sounds like *Genesis* 1, where God says, “Let there be light.” What is Hurston’s purpose and what does it do to this scene?
9. Why do the townspeople turn on Joe in this chapter? And then, later, how do they change?

Chapter 6 Questions: Select quotations from the text that support your answers.

1. In this chapter, Hurston uses dialect to be funny. Was Richard Wright correct when he criticized her and said it sounds like a minstrel show?
2. How is Matt Bonner being teased and how does he respond? What can you infer about him from this scene?
3. The mule scene is rather famous. How does Hurston personify the mule? Why does Hurston do this?
4. And what is the effect of putting a human version of a burial next to the buzzard version?
5. What is your reaction to Jody’s comment, “Somebody got to think for women and chillun and chickens and cows”? What can you infer about the town based on their reaction to Jody’s treatment of Janie?

Chapter 7 Questions: Select quotations from the text that support your answers.

1. What finally makes Janie stand up to Jody in public? What changed?

2. Look back at the passage when Jody and Janie first met. When Janie refers to his “big voice” now, how is it ironic?
3. When Janie says, “You look lak de change uh life” to Jody, how does he react? How does everyone else react? What has changed?
4. Biblical allusion #3: Why does Hurston allude to Saul’s daughter and David in this scene?

Chapter 8 Questions: Select quotations from the text that support your answers.

1. Janie has already embarrassed and humiliated Jody publicly (and what did you infer from that?), so why does she say she doesn’t want to hurt him? What can you infer from this new turn?
2. Does Janie kill Jody? Defend your answer with examples from the text.
3. Janie and Joe’s final conversation represents their whole life together. Discuss the dynamic between them.
4. What does Janie do in the final paragraph of the chapter, before she goes out to talk to the town about Jody’s death?

Chapter 9 Questions: Select quotations from the text that support your answers.

1. Janie’s “starched and ironed face” is an image Hurston used in the previous chapter. What is the effect of the repetition?
2. Is the funeral a reflection or a foil for Janie’s internal state?
3. What happens to Janie’s hair in this chapter? What does this symbolize?
4. Compare Hurston’s ocean imagery here to the description of them at the beginning of the book. What is the effect of this?
5. Biblical allusion #4: Creation and Janie’s part in it—what can you infer about Janie now?
6. Why does Janie hate Nanny?

Chapter 10 Questions: Select quotations from the text that support your answers.

1. Tea Cake plays checkers. Is this important? If so, why?
2. Verigible is a dialectical offshoot of *veritable* (use the dictionary). Why is he the *one* character with a symbolic name?
3. Compare and contrast Janie’s meeting Tea Cake with the moment she met Logan and the first moment she saw and spoke to Jody. Differences? Similarities? What is Hurston’s purpose?

Chapter 11 Questions: Select quotations from the text that support your answers.

1. Biblical allusion #5: Peter walking on the Sea of Galilee. Why does Hurston use this reference?
2. Logan didn’t give Janie her pear tree; nor did Jody. Will Tea Cake? How? Why? Use the text to back up your predictions.
3. When Tea Cake says, “Have de nerve tuh say whut you mean,” what is the impact on Janie? What is the impact on you? What kind of characterization is this?

Chapter 12 Questions: Select quotations from the text that support your answers.

1. Hurston starts this chapter off in another voice. Whose voice is it, and why does she do this? How does this help define the community?
2. What is the significance of Janie's saying, "Ah ain't grievin' so why do Ah hafta mourn?" What kinds of conflicts appear in this chapter?
3. Do you trust Tea Cake? Does the town? Why or why not?
4. Define "class off." Who did it and how?
5. How does Hurston use Phoeby in this chapter? How does Hurston use her in the rest of the book? Why?

Chapter 13 Questions: Select quotations from the text that support your answers.

1. This is Janie's third wedding. How has she ended her other marriages? How does this wedding compare to her first two?
2. How does Janie deal with her \$200? What does Phoeby tell her to do?
3. What is the purpose of the alligator image? Does it work for you? Why or why not?
4. Tea Cake spends the money. What is your reaction? What is Janie's reaction? How would you have reacted if you were Janie? Why does Hurston have Tea Cake do this?
5. What is Janie's reaction to Tea Cake's gambling? Why?
6. Why are they on the move again at the end of the chapter, and how does Janie feel about that? Why don't they stay put?

Chapter 14 Questions: Select quotations from the text that support your answers.

1. Tea Cake wants Janie to learn how to shoot a pistol, a shotgun, and a rifle. Why? What is Janie's response? What is the tone of this section?
2. How do folks on the Muck think about the future? What are Tea Cake's thoughts? Janie's thoughts? Which character do you resemble most when it comes to future-thinking? Why?
3. Janie's clothes change in this new community. What does the change symbolize?
4. How does the community of the Muck compare to the community of Eatonville? (And if you've read *Gatsby*, how do the communities in *Their Eyes* compare to the communities in Fitzgerald's world?)

Chapter 15 Questions: Select quotations from the text that support your answers.

1. What happens in this chapter? Why does Hurston put this chapter here?
2. Why is Tea Cake ashamed and why does Janie hit him?

Chapter 16 Questions: Select quotations from the text that support your answers.

1. Mrs. Turner is very clearly prejudiced. How does Janie react to her? Why does Mrs. Turner like Janie?
2. Why doesn't Mrs. Turner like Tea Cake?
3. Why does Hurston call Mr. Turner's laugh "powerless"? How is he characterized? Why?
4. How does Hurston's dialogue change in this chapter?

Chapter 17 Questions: Select quotations from the text that support your answers.

1. This is the first chapter in a while wherein Janie seems to lose her voice. We know about the beating and what the men say afterwards, but Janie herself doesn't speak. Why does Hurston do this? How should we respond?

2. What happens at Mrs. Turner's? Why? Who arranges it? How does this affect the community?
3. At the end of the chapter, what is the interaction between the men and Mrs. Turner? Why does Hurston do this?

Chapter 18 Questions: Select quotations from the text that support your answers.

1. What kinds of foreshadowing (and ironic foreshadowing) occur at the beginning of this chapter?
2. The Lake is personified as a monster. How does this fit in with the rest of the book? (title, Biblical allusions, imagery, etc.)
3. "Six eyes were questioning *God*." What is the significance of that line?
4. Biblical allusion #6: The Flood. How does this one compare with the Bible?
5. Discuss the dog bite Tea Cake receives. What is significant about it?
6. Reference to title #1: you finally saw the title of the book. What does it mean to you now?

Chapter 19 Questions: Select quotations from the text that support your answers.

1. Reference to the title #2: "Death had found them watching...." Discuss the importance of this passage.
2. What does Hurston have to say about race when she discusses burying those who died?
3. What sickness does Tea Cake have? Do some research. What is going on?
4. "Something else was looking out of his face." Discuss the imagery and importance in this passage.
5. What is Janie thinking when she decides to shoot? Why does she shoot? Discuss Hurston's staging of this scene.
6. Describe the jury. How does Janie see the people in the courtroom?
7. Why does Hurston wait until this moment for white characters to appear? (There is some controversy about this section.)
8. Discuss Janie's response to the white women in the court. Of what does she want to convince them? Why? Why does it matter to her? Would you feel differently? Why or why not?
9. The courtroom is the second time that Janie doesn't speak. The court scene is related in the third person. Why does Hurston do this?

Chapter 20 Questions: Select quotations from the text that support your answers.

1. In this chapter we return to Phoebe's and the beginning of the book. This happened in a smaller way earlier. Now the book is over. Was Hurston's framing technique effective?
2. What is Phoebe supposed to tell the others? Do you agree with this? How is Hurston using Phoebe? Why?
3. Describe Janie's point of view at the end of the chapter.
4. Discuss the tone of the last paragraph and last line of the novel. How do you feel about the way the novel ends?