

AP Literature & Composition Brady

Your summer reading assignment is *Their Eyes Were Watching God* by Zora Neale Hurston (1937). Please read the first 10 chapters and complete the questions for the first day of class this coming August. You should have a hard copy of the assignment to turn in and also be prepared to submit the assignment electronically. If you have any questions, please email me at ebrady@bishopdwenger.com

Reading Guide for *Their Eyes Were Watching God* by Zora Neale Hurston

Their Eyes Were Watching God is a “coming of age” story focusing on the life Janie Crawford, a young girl and later a middle-aged woman who grows up and comes of age in the rural south sometime between the 1890s and 1920s. The chronology of Janie’s life begins in southern, rural Georgia but then moves to Eatonville, Florida; then the Florida Everglades, and finally back to Eatonville. Early chapters also take the reader back into the histories of Janie’s mother and grandmother, the latter who was once a slave. As a reader, you would be very wise to keep the historical context in mind as you examine the various obstacles that Janie must overcome as she attempts to define herself throughout her life. Zora Neale Hurston wrote the novel in the 1930s while she was doing anthropological research in Haiti. It was published in 1937.

According to Susan Hader, “*Bildungsroman* denotes a novel of all-around self-development. Used generally, it encompasses a few similar aspects: a story of general growth rather than self-culture; the training and formal education; and the development of an artist. (*The Space Between*, 13).” Hader discusses “the *Bildungsroman* genre as a whole and how it applies to all three.

- A *Bildungsroman* is, most generally, **the story of a single individual's growth and development within the context of a defined social order**. The growth process, at its roots a quest story, has been described as both "an apprenticeship to life" and a "search for meaningful existence within society."
- To spur the protagonist on his or her journey, **some form of loss or discontent must jar them at an early stage away from the home or family setting**.
- The process of maturity is long, arduous, and gradual, consisting of **repeated clashes between the protagonist's needs and desires and the views and judgments enforced by an unbending social order**.
- Eventually, the spirit and values of the social order may become manifest in various forms of “discontent” of the protagonist, who is either forced to conform to social conventions, or who rejects society’s spirit and values in order to live a life which is fulfilling and meaningful. The coming-of-age-novel ends with a deep self-assessment by the protagonist, and this self-assessment will often reveal various forms of societal weakness, deficiency, hypocrisy or moral corruption.

Consider the definition above as you move toward the questions that follow.

Part I: Connecting to bildungsroman, discontentment & need: Consider these question:

1. What forms of “discontent” are evident early in Janie’s relationship with Nanny? --What specific needs are not being met in Janie’s relationship with Nanny?
2. What forms of “discontent” are evident in Janie’s relationship with Logan? --What specific needs are not being met in Janie’s relationship with Logan?
3. What forms of “discontent” are evident in Janie’s relationship with Joe? --What specific needs are not being met in Janie’s relationship with Joe?
4. What forms of “discontent” are evident in Janie’s relationships with the citizens of Eatonville, with the men who pursue her before and after Joe’s death?

Respond to each of the above with a paragraph.

Part II: Questions for Chapters 1-10.

Respond with a sentence or two. Some responses will be a bit longer, and some may be brief.

1. According to Hurston in the opening paragraphs of the novel, how do men treat their dreams in contrast to women?
2. In the beginning of the novel, Janie has just returned to town. How do the townfolk respond to her return?
3. What kind of clothing is Janie wearing at the beginning of the novel?
4. How is Janie wearing her hair?
5. What are the details mentioned in the answers to questions 4 and 5 intended to suggest about Janie’s character?
6. What does Hurston mean at the beginning of the chapter when she says the men of Eatonville were “saving with the mind what they lost with the eye”?
7. According to Sam Watson, why do many of the people of Eatonville look forward to the Day of Judgment?
8. According to Hurston, what is the oldest human longing?
9. What is the “muck”?
10. How did Janie learn for the first time in her life that she was not white?
11. Why and how did Johnny Taylor & Janie upset Nanny?
12. What specific episode marked the end of Janie’s childhood?
13. Why did Nanny favor Logan Killicks over Johnny Taylor?
14. What does the narrator mean when she says, g“The vision of Logan Killicks was desecrating the pear tree”?
15. According to Nanny, who or what is the “mule uh de world”?
16. How does Nanny’s background and history lead her to respect and admire somebody like Logan Killicks?

17. Why was Nanny whipped when she was younger?
18. How was Janie was conceived?
19. What were Nanny's final words before she died?
20. How did Janie react to the physical appearance of Logan Killicks?
21. Under what circumstances did Janie first come to meet Jody?
22. How did Janie silence Hicks the first time he tried to flirt with her?
23. What item did Joe Starks buy from Sears and Roebuck that helped advance his fame in the town of Eatonville?
24. What did Joe Stark's house look like?
25. Why did Joe make Henry Pitts leave town?
26. Why did the citizens of Eatonville frequently make fun of Matt Bonner?
27. What did Joe force Janie to wear while she worked in the store? Why?
28. Why did Janie once compare her husband to Abe Lincoln and George Washington?
29. Why wouldn't Jody allow Janie to attend a mule's funeral?
30. Why did Jody to strike Janie for the first time?
31. Approximately how old was Janie when she began to entertain the idea of running out on Joe?
32. How did Joe Starks change physically as he began to age?
33. What circumstances led Joe to strike Janie the second time -- the time that "drove her from the store"?
34. Why did Joe start to see a "root-doctor"?
35. What rumors were the people of Eatonville spreading about Janie's treatment of her husband?
36. Why did the word "kidney" force Janie to think about death?
37. According to Janie, what did Joe Starks always deny her the opportunity to use?
38. What does Janie see in the looking glass at the end of chapter 8?
39. Why do scores of men begin to offer their services to Janie at the beginning of chapter 9?
40. Who was Hezekiah and how did he treat Janie?
41. What kind of relationship developed between Phoebe Watson, Janie, and the Sanford undertaker?
42. Who was Vergible Woods?
43. What specific circumstances led Vergible Woods to Janie?

**** The list of vocabulary words that were distributed with the books will be explored after we begin school. You do not need to do anything with the word list for the summer assignment.

Thanks to Tom Reynolds for sharing ideas.