**Their Eyes Were Watching God Reading Guide**

**Title**: Their Eyes Were Watching God

**Author**: Zora Neal Hurston

**Setting**: Eatonville, Florida, and the Everglades, early 20th century

**Plot Summary**: In "Their Eyes Were Watching God," Janie Crawford, an African American woman in the early 20th century, embarks on a journey of self-discovery and empowerment. The novel traces her life through three marriages, each representing different aspects of love, independence, and identity. Janie's quest for her own voice and autonomy leads her to confront societal norms and personal challenges, ultimately finding her sense of self and fulfillment.

**Major Characters:**

1. **Janie Crawford:** The protagonist, Janie is a strong, independent woman who evolves through her experiences with love, hardship, and self-discovery. Her character symbolizes the quest for personal identity and empowerment.
2. **Nanny Crawford:** Janie's grandmother, who raises her and arranges her first marriage. Nanny's character represents the older generation's pragmatic approach to security and survival.
3. **Logan Killicks:** Janie's first husband, chosen by Nanny for his financial stability. Logan's character represents traditional, oppressive marital expectations.
4. **Joe "Jody" Starks:** Janie's ambitious second husband who becomes the mayor of Eatonville. Jody's character symbolizes control and the pursuit of power at the expense of personal relationships.
5. **Vergible "Tea Cake" Woods:** Janie's third husband, who embodies love, freedom, and adventure. Tea Cake's character represents the ideal of a loving, egalitarian partnership.

**Themes:**

* **Search for Identity**: The novel explores Janie's journey to find her own voice and identity amidst societal and personal expectations.
* **Love and Relationships**: The different forms of love and relationships Janie experiences highlight the complexities of human connections.
* **Gender Roles and Independence**: The novel examines traditional gender roles and Janie's struggle for independence and self-expression.
* **Racism**: The novel addresses the impacts of racial prejudice and discrimination on individuals and communities, as well as internalized racism within some members of the Black community.

**Chapter Review Questions**: Answering the following questions will increase your comprehension of the novel. Respond to these questions by writing the answers in your notebook. *Some of the questions require you to express an opinion or describe your reaction to events in the novel. In these instances, there is no right or wrong answer, and your responses will vary.* The answers to factual questions are included in this reading guide.

**Chapter 1**

1. Consider the first paragraph of this chapter. How does this set the tone for the novel? What do you think the intention was of Hurston in starting out the book this way? What reaction do you have to reading this first paragraph?
2. What are the initial impressions of Janie as she returns to Eatonville? How do the townspeople's reactions to her return set the stage for the rest of the novel?
3. Consider the time period in which Hurston wrote this novel. How might the historical context of the Great Migration and the Harlem Renaissance have influenced the themes and characters in the story?
4. Analyze the use of dialect in the dialogue among the townspeople. How does Hurston's use of dialect contribute to the authenticity and richness of the characters?

**Chapter 2**

1. Analyze the quote, "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” (page 8). What does this reveal about Janie's perspective on her life and experiences? Does this view resonate with you? Explain your thinking.
2. What role does the pear tree play in Janie’s understanding of love and relationships? How does this symbol evolve throughout the chapter? Do you think this is an effective symbol? Explain your thinking.
3. Pick one quote that you think exemplifies the character of Nanny. Include that quote here. Explain what you think the quote exemplifies about Nanny along with an explanation of why you selected it.
4. In this chapter Nanny says, “You know, honey, us colored folks is branches without roots and that makes things come round in queer ways” (page 16). What do you think Nanny means by this quote? How might slavery have resulted in people feeling like they had no roots? Explain your thinking.

**Chapter 3**

1. How does the historical context of the early 20th century American South impact the characters and themes in this chapter? Consider the role of racism, gender norms, and economic circumstances.
2. What is the difference between Janie’s and Nanny’s ideas of love? Which one resonates more with you? Explain your thinking.
3. Analyze the use of dialogue between Janie and Nanny. How does their dialogue develop their characters and reveal the tensions in their relationship? Include at least one quote to support your thinking. Which character do you find yourself siding with more? Explain your thinking.
4. The narrator states "There is a basin in the mind where words float around on thought and thought on sound and sight" (page 24). How does this description relate to Janie's inner experience? Do you find this description to be impactful? Explain your thinking.

**Chapter 4**

1. Predict what you think Joe will end up being like. How do you think Janie’s life will change?
2. Pick one quote that you think exemplifies the character of Joe. Include that quote here. Explain what you think the quote exemplifies about Joe along with an explanation of why you selected it.
3. "The memory of Nanny was still powerful and strong" (page 29). How does Nanny's influence continue to impact Janie's choices in this chapter? Who in your life influences your choices?
4. How does the dialogue between Janie and Joe Starks reveal their contrasting perspectives on gender roles and expectations for women during this time period? Include at least one quote to support your thinking. Do you think these perspectives remain today? Explain your thinking.

**Chapter 5**

1. In what ways do you think Janie's character develops or remains relatively static in this chapter? Explain your thinking.
2. How does Joe see Janie? Include at least one quote to support your thinking. Do you think the way Joe sees Janie is an accurate representation of who she is? Explain your thinking.
3. How do the townspeople feel about Joe’s fancy possessions? Include a quote to support your thinking. How would you feel if you were the townspeople?
4. Analyze this quote, “But any man who walks in the way of power and property is bound to meet hate” (page 48). What do you think this quote means? Does this quote resonate with you today? Explain your thinking.

**Chapter 6**

1. The narrator describes Janie having "an inside and an outside" self after Joe slaps her. What do you think this means? What is the significance of this realization in Janie's character development?
2. Do you think the concept of gender roles and expectations for women reinforced or challenged through the characters' dialogue and actions in this chapter? Explain your thinking. Include at least one quote from the chapter to support your thinking.
3. What does the conversation between the men on the porch about Matt Bonner’s mule reveal about their attitudes and the social dynamics of the town?
4. How does the treatment of Matt Bonner’s mule by the townspeople serve as a commentary on the broader themes of power, freedom, and oppression in the novel? What might the mule's eventual death symbolize in the context of the story? How do you feel about how the mule was treated?

**Chapter 7**

1. The theme of power and control is prevalent in this chapter. Include one specific example from this chapter where that theme arises. How do you think your example contributes to the message the author is trying to convey about power and control? Explain your thinking.
2. What is the significance of Janie speaking out against Joe in front of the townspeople? How does this moment mark a turning point in their relationship? Did her action surprise you with what you have learned about her so far? Explain your thinking.
3. Analyze the quote, “She got so she received all things with the stolidness of the earth which soaks up urine and perfume with the same indifference” (page 77). What does this quote mean to you? Do you think this metaphor is successful? Explain your thinking.
4. Why was Janie’s action such a big deal to Joe? What do you think Joe was feeling at the end of the chapter? Explain your thinking.

**Chapter 8**

1. Reread this quote, ‘They came to the store and ostentatiously looked over whatever she was doing and went back to report to him at the house” (page 83). What would you think of this if you were Janie? Explain your thinking.
2. Pick one quote that you think exemplifies the character of Janie in this chapter. Include that quote here. Explain what you think the quote exemplifies about Janie along with an explanation of why you selected it.
3. Examine this quote, ‘She got up that morning with the firm determination to go in there and have a good talk with Jody. But she sat a long time with the walls creeping in on her. Four walls squeezing her breath out” (page 84). Write a list of 5+ feelings that Janie might be having in this moment. Explain why you chose the feelings you did. Or, you can source or create an image of this scene including the image here along with a description of the stylistic choices you made or selected and how they relate to the text.
4. Consider Joe's refusal to let Janie into his sick room and his reliance on the root doctor. Thinking on what you have learned about Joe, does this action surprise you? Why do you think Joe makes this refusal? Explain your thinking.

**Chapter 9**

1. Analyze the conversation between Janie and Ike Green. What does this dialogue reveal about societal expectations for widowed women and Janie's resistance to these expectations? Were you surprised by this conversation? Explain your thinking.
2. Did Janie’s reaction to Joe’s death or her actions afterward surprise you knowing what you know about her character and their relationship? Explain your thinking.
3. Analyze this quote, “She sent her face to Joe’s funeral, and herself went rollicking with the springtime across the world” (page 88). What does the author convey with this quote about Janie’s mindset? Think of an instance where what is on someone’s face might not match what they are thinking. Share an example that comes to mind.

**Chapter 10**

1. Pick one quote that you think exemplifies the character of Tea Cake. Include that quote here. Explain what you think the quote exemplifies about Tea Cake along with an explanation of why you selected it.
2. How does the dynamic between Janie and Tea Cake differ from Janie's previous relationships? How do you feel about Tea Cake in comparison?
3. Predict what will happen between Janie and Tea Cake based on what you have learned about them so far. Explain the thinking behind your prediction.

**Chapter 11**

1. What is the significance of Tea Cake mimicking playing a guitar when he first returns to see Janie? How does this playful gesture set the tone for their interactions?
2. What are your impressions of Tea Cake so far? Explain your thinking.
3. Analyze the quote: "He looked like the love thoughts of women. He could be a bee to a blossom — a pear tree blossom in the spring." What does this metaphorical language reveal about how Janie views Tea Cake? How does this compare to the first instance of the pear tree at the beginning of the novel? Why do you think Hurston brings this symbol back up?
4. Reread this quote, “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” (page 108). Does this reaction surprise you from Janie? Why do you think she is feeling this way? What is she doubting? Explain our thinking.

**Chapter 12**

1. Pheoby expresses concern that Tea Cake is just after Janie's money. What is Janie's response, and what does it show about her perspective? Do you share Pheoby’s concern? Explain your position.
2. The author uses a lot of dialogue in this chapter between Janie, Pheoby, and the townspeople's gossip. How does this literary technique of dialogue enhance the storytelling and characterization? Include at least one specific example from this chapter.
3. How does Janie feel about Tea Cake? How can you tell? Include at least one quote to support your thinking.
4. Janie feels she has lived by her grandmother's values so far, but now wants to "live mine." When have you felt a similar desire to forge your own path, different from your family's expectations?

**Chapter 13**

1. What do you think about Tea Cake taking the money? Why do you think Janie does not get mad? Does her reaction surprise you? Explain your thinking.
2. When Tea Cake is missing for days, Janie thinks of the cautionary tale of Annie Tyler and her disastrous relationship. When have you had a friend/family member's negative experience make you doubt your own situation?
3. What do you think of Tea Cake’s story? Why do you think Janie tells him about the other money she has in the bank?
4. The chapter ends with the line: "So her soul crawled out from its hiding place" (page 128). What do you think this metaphorical language suggests about Janie? How do you see her changing and do you think that is a good thing?

**Chapter 14**

1. This chapter starts with a description of the Everglades. Create or source an image depicting this scene. Include the image alongside a description of how it depicts specific facets of the scene.
2. Are you surprised by Janie’s reaction to Tea Cake telling her to work? What would Janie have said if her other husbands told her to work? Explain your thinking.
3. Why do you think the people here see Janie’s rightful place as out working in the field when the people of Eatonville would have disagreed?
4. The narrator describes the migrant workers pouring in, calling them "Permanent transients with no attachments." Analyze this paradoxical description - what does it reveal about their lifestyle? What does this reveal about opportunities during this time period?

**Chapter 15**

1. This chapter starts with the quote, “Janie learned what it felt like to be jealous” (page 136). Why do you think she was never jealous before? Explain your thinking.
2. What do you currently think of Tea Cake and how Janie is handing life? Explain your thinking.
3. Hurston uses a mix of narration and dialogue in this intense scene between the couple. Do you think weaving the two literary techniques together enhances the storytelling? Explain your thinking.

**Chapter 16**

1. Pick one quote that you think exemplifies the character of Mrs. Turner. Include that quote here. Explain what you think the quote exemplifies about Mrs. Turner along with an explanation of why you selected it.
2. Mrs. Turner makes racist comments like "It’s too many black folks already. We outta lighten up de race" (page 140). Do you think these overt expressions of anti-Black racism reflect the time period and societal attitudes? Explain your thinking.
3. The narrator states of Mrs. Turner: "All gods who receive homage are cruel. All gods dispense suffering without reason" (page 145). What do you think Hurston suggesting with this quote? Do you agree with the author? Explain your thinking.
4. Mrs. Turner has internalized racist beauty standards that prioritize whiteness that leader her to resent her own Blackness while venerating Janie’s lighter complexion? How do you think these beauty standards were perpetuated during this time? Do you see similar racist beauty standards today? Explain your thinking.

**Chapter 17**

1. Did it surprise you that Tea Cake stood up for Mrs. Turner? Why do you think he did this? Explain your thinking.
2. Tea Cake claims he hit Janie to show "dem Turners who is boss" (page 148). after Mrs. Turner's racist insults. Does this context make his actions more understandable or not? Explain your thinking.
3. Mrs. Turner's husband is completely passive during the fight, which enrages her. What does his inaction suggest about gender roles and her own racism/classism toward him?
4. Make a prediction, do you think there will be any repercussions for Tea Cake talking about Janie’s money? Explain your thinking.

**Chapter 18**

1. The author uses personification in this chapter. Here is an example, “The sea was walking the earth with a heavy heel” (page 162). What impact do you think the author was trying to make with this choice? Do you think she was successful? Explain your thinking. Find another example of personification in this chapter and include it here along with an explanation of why you chose that specific example.
2. The title "Their Eyes Were Watching God" takes on new significance during the storm scene. What deeper meaning does this phrase carry in these chapters depicting their struggle to survive? Why do you think this scene inspired the title of the book?
3. Analyze this quote, “common danger made common friends” (page 164). What does this mean within the context of this chapter? Does this quote resonate with you outside of this book? Can you think of an example where this might manifest within society today?
4. How does Janie feel about life and to whom does she credit for that shift? Does this sentiment from her surprise you? Explain your thinking.

**Chapter 19**

1. Analyze the metaphorical language: "He was on the kitchen floor in great agony when she returned. She petted him, soothed him, and got him back to bed. She made up her mind to go see about that medicine from Palm Beach. Maybe she could find somebody to drive over there for it" (page 179). What does this animalistic description suggest about Tea Cake's condition?
2. Reread this quote, “The white doctor who had been around so long that he was part of the muck” (page 174). What do you think Hurston means when she includes this quote? After reading the entire interaction with the doctor, how do you think Tea Cake feels about the doctor? Why do you think he feels that way?
3. The chapter contains vivid descriptions of the trial proceedings and the all-white, male jury judging Janie. How does Hurston's attention to these court details underscore the racial injustices at play? Do you think these injustices remain today within the court system? Explain your thinking.
4. After the verdict, Janie overhears racist comments like "She didn't kill no white man, did she" (page 189). Discuss how you think this casual racism does or does not reflect the unjust attitudes of the time.

**Chapter 20**

1. Analyze this description of love: "Love is lak de sea. It's uh movin' thing, but still and all, it takes its shape from de shore it meets, and it's different with every shore" (page 191). What is Hurston suggesting about the nature of love? Do you agree with this interpretation? Explain your thinking.
2. How does the community try to make amends and regain Janie's trust after turning against her, such as blaming Mrs. Turner's brother? Does this redemption feel genuine or self-serving?
3. What does Janie mean when she says "Ah done been tuh de horizon and back and now Ah kin set heah in mah house and live by comparisons?" (page 191). What do you think her journey taught her? What do you think the author wanted to convey Janie’s journey taught her?
4. Does the end of the novel surprise you? If you could have the novel end in a different way, how would you change it and why?

**Answers to Chapter Review Questions:**

**Chapter 1**

1. \*Answers will vary
2. When Janie comes back to Eatonville, the townspeople have a lot of mixed feelings about her. The women are pretty judgmental, criticizing her for wearing overalls instead of a dress. The men, on the other hand, are mostly captivated by her physical appearance. The way the townspeople react to Janie's return sets the stage for the rest of the novel. It highlights themes like judgment, gossip, and societal expectations. Their curiosity and harsh judgments hint at the challenges Janie will face as she tries to live her life.
3. These events probably influenced Hurston's themes and characters. The Great Migration involved African Americans moving from the rural South to cities in the North, looking for better opportunities and escaping racism. This led to big cultural changes and the Harlem Renaissance, a time when African American art, literature, and music flourished. Hurston's portrayal of Janie as a strong, independent woman who returns to a small Southern town after experiencing life elsewhere reflects the broader themes of migration and self-discovery. The novel explores identity, community, and the struggle for self-expression, which align with the cultural and social shifts of the time.
4. Hurston's use of dialect in the townspeople's dialogue makes the characters feel more real and authentic. The way they talk, with their unique speech patterns and expressions, really brings their personalities to life. The dialect also helps to show the differences between characters and gives insight into their social status and relationships. It creates a sense of intimacy and makes the reader feel like they're right there in Eatonville.

**Chapter 2**

1. \*Answers will vary
2. \*Answers will vary
3. \*Answers will vary
4. \*Answers will vary

**Chapter 3**

1. The early 20th century Southern setting really shapes the characters and themes. Janie's marriage to Logan is influenced by Nanny's fears about racism and her desire for Janie to have economic security, which was crucial for Black families at the time. Gender norms are also a big deal, with Janie feeling pressured to love Logan just because they’re married, showing how women were expected to be dutiful wives. Economic stability is highlighted through Nanny's emphasis on Logan’s land, contrasting with Janie's desire for emotional fulfillment. This chapter sets up Janie's struggle between societal expectations and her own dreams.
2. \*Answers will vary
3. \*Answers will vary
4. \*Answers will vary

**Chapter 4**

1. \*Answers will vary
2. \*Answers will vary
3. \*Answers will vary
4. \*Answers will vary

**Chapter 5**

1. \*Answers will vary
2. \*Answers will vary
3. \*Answers will vary
4. \*Answers will vary

**Chapter 6**

1. When the narrator says Janie has "an inside and an outside" self after Joe slaps her, it means she starts to see a difference between her true feelings and the way she acts in public. Inside, she feels hurt and angry, but she hides those emotions to keep up appearances. This realization is crucial because it marks the beginning of Janie understanding her own identity and the conflict between who she is and who she's expected to be. It sets her on a path toward finding her true self.
2. \*Answers will vary
3. The men's conversation about Matt Bonner’s mule shows that they see the mule as a joke and a way to entertain themselves. Their mocking attitude highlights a lack of empathy and respect for the mule, which reflects how they might treat other vulnerable beings. This talk also reveals the social dynamics in the town, where those who feel superior often belittle others. The mule symbolizes oppression and mistreatment, much like what Janie experiences in her own life.
4. \*Answers will vary

**Chapter 7**

1. \*Answers will vary
2. \*Answers will vary
3. \*Answers will vary
4. \*Answers will vary

**Chapter 8**

1. \*Answers will vary
2. \*Answers will vary
3. \*Answers will vary
4. \*Answers will vary

**Chapter 9**

1. \*Answers will vary
2. \*Answers will vary
3. \*Answers will vary

**Chapter 10**

1. \*Answers will vary
2. \*Answers will vary
3. \*Answers will vary

**Chapter 11**

1. When Tea Cake first returns to see Janie, he pretends to tune and play an imaginary guitar. This playful gesture sets a light-hearted and fun tone for their interactions. It shows Tea Cake's sense of humor and his ability to make Janie smile, which is a stark contrast to the seriousness and control she experienced with Joe. This moment helps to break the ice and establishes a more relaxed and genuine connection between them.
2. \*Answers will vary
3. \*Answers will vary
4. \*Answers will vary

**Chapter 12**

1. \*Answers will vary
2. \*Answers will vary
3. \*Answers will vary
4. \*Answers will vary

**Chapter 13**

1. \*Answers will vary
2. \*Answers will vary
3. \*Answers will vary
4. \*Answers will vary

**Chapter 14**

1. \*Answers will vary
2. \*Answers will vary
3. \*Answers will vary
4. \*Answers will vary

**Chapter 15**

1. \*Answers will vary
2. \*Answers will vary
3. \*Answers will vary

**Chapter 16**

1. \*Answers will vary
2. \*Answers will vary
3. \*Answers will vary
4. \*Answers will vary

**Chapter 17**

1. \*Answers will vary
2. \*Answers will vary
3. Mrs. Turner's husband does nothing during the fight, which makes her furious. His lack of action suggests he doesn't fit the traditional male role of being protective and assertive. This frustrates Mrs. Turner, who already looks down on him due to her own racist and classist beliefs. She sees his inaction as proof of his inferiority, both as a man and within her prejudiced view of social hierarchy.
4. \*Answers will vary

**Chapter 18**

1. \*Answers will vary
2. \*Answers will vary
3. \*Answers will vary
4. \*Answers will vary

**Chapter 19**

1. This description highlights his deteriorating state. This description suggests that Tea Cake is in severe pain and has become helpless, almost like a wounded animal needing care. It also suggests that he has rabies.
2. \*Answers will vary
3. \*Answers will vary
4. \*Answers will vary

**Chapter 20**

1. \*Answers will vary
2. \*Answers will vary
3. \*Answers will vary
4. \*Answers will vary