



 Prestwick House

Activity Pack

THEIR EYES WERE WATCHING GOD

BY ZORA NEALE HURSTON



Copyright © 2001 by Prestwick House, Inc., P.O. Box 658, Clayton, DE 19938. 1-800-932-4593. www.prestwickhouse.com Permission to use this unit for classroom use is extended to purchaser for his or her personal use. This material, in whole or part, may not be copied for resale.

ISBN 978-1-60389-302-2

Item No. 200825

Name: _____

Date: _____

Pre-Reading**Chronology****Objective:** Writing a chronology**Activity**

At the end of this novel is a chronology of Hurston's life. Notice how the important events of Hurston's life are arranged by date, with each event briefly described in an incomplete sentence.

In the Foreword, Mary Helen Washington discusses why *Their Eyes Were Watching God* was republished and why it is still so popular long after Hurston's death, ultimately becoming an African-American literary classic. Based on the Foreword, construct a chronology of the novel's initial reception by other black writers and of its later rediscovery. Because you will be dealing with a number of people and their reactions to the novel, you will need to use complete sentences in your chronology rather than the fragmented sentences in the Hurston chronology.

Name: _____

Date: _____

Chapters 1 – 5**Personification I**

Objective: Identifying examples of personification

Activity

On the next page that follows state what image each of the examples of personification conveys and point out what two things are being compared.

Example: The gorilla sat there, looking at the leaves, still, a man deep in the middle of a philosophical debate about the meaning of the world.

Image conveyed: An ape sitting in the jungle

Two things compared: The gorilla is compared to a philosopher who wonders about the world. Obviously, the gorilla is wondering about eating the leaves; it is not a man thinking.

Name: _____

Date: _____

Chapters 2 – 8

Supporting Statements

Objective: Using incidents or quotations from the text to support statements of theme

Activity

A good technique in writing an answer to an essay test question is to rephrase the question as a statement, which includes your main point.

For example, here is a test question.

What is an important concept or theme that runs through the novel *To Kill A Mockingbird*?

Your answer might begin: An important theme in the novel *To Kill A Mockingbird* is Jem's coming of age. As the novel progresses, he comes to better understand his father, the community of Maycomb, and human nature.

State one of the following themes of *Their Eyes Were Watching God* as a thesis statement and, in an essay, support your statement by providing incidents, quotations, or comments from the novel.

- **Theme #1:** Janie searches for self-awareness.
- **Theme #2:** Men do not think of or treat women as equals.
- **Theme #3:** Some men value power and things money can buy more than they value the people in their lives.

Be sure your opening thesis clearly states the theme you are supporting.

Name: _____

Date: _____

Chapter 11

Style II

Objective: Understanding the concept of style and recognizing the elements that characterize it

Activity

With an eye to the way they were written, compare and contrast the styles in each of these selections and enter your observation on the chart.

from *To Kill A Mockingbird* by Harper Lee:

She was horrible. Her face was the color of a dirty pillowcase, and the corners of her mouth glistened with wet, which inched like a glacier down the deep grooves enclosing her chin. Old-age liver spots dotted her cheeks, and her pale eyes had black pinpoint pupils. Her hands were knobby, and the cuticles were grown up over her fingernails. Her bottom plate was not in, and her upper lip protruded; from time to time she would draw her nether lip to her upper plate and carry her chin with it. This made the wet move faster.

I didn't look any more than I had to. Jem reopened *Ivanhoe* and began reading. I tried to keep up with him, but he read too fast. When Jem came to a word he didn't know he skipped it, but Mrs. Dubose would catch him and make him spell it out. Jem read for perhaps twenty minutes, during which time I looked at the soot stained mantelpiece, out the window, anywhere to keep from looking at her. As he read along, I noticed that Mrs. Dubose's corrections grew fewer and farther between, that Jem had even left one sentence dangling in mid-air. She was not listening.

from *The Old Man And The Sea* by Ernest Hemingway:

The fish moved steadily and they traveled slowly on the calm water. The other baits were still in the water but there was nothing to be done.

"I wish I had the boy," the old man said aloud. "I'm being towed by a fish and I'm the towing bitt. I could make the line fast. But then he could break it. I must hold him all I can and give him line when he must have it. Thank God he is travelling and not going down."

What I will do if he decides to go down, I don't know. What I'll do if he sounds and dies I don't know. But I'll do something. There are plenty of things I can do.

from *Demian* by Herman Hesse:

When authors write novels, they usually act as if they were God and could completely survey and comprehend some person's history and present it as if God were telling it to Himself, totally unveiled, in its essence at all points. I can't, any more than any author's is to him, because it's my own; it's the story of a human being—not an invented, potential, ideal, or otherwise nonexistent person, but a real unique living one. To be sure, people today have less of an idea than ever before what a really living person is; in fact, human beings, each one of whom is a priceless, unique experiment of nature, are being shot to death in carloads. If we weren't something more than unique individuals, if we could really be totally dispatched from the world by a bullet, it would no longer make sense to tell stories. But each person is not only himself, he is also the unique, very special point, important and noteworthy in every instance, where the phenomena of the world meet, once only and never again in the same way. And so every person's story is important, eternal, divine; and so every person, to the extent that he lives and fulfills nature's will, is wondrous and deserving of full attention. In each of us spirit has become form, in each of us the created being suffers, in each of us a redeemer is crucified.

Name: _____

Date: _____

Chapters 13 – 17**Characterization**

Objective: Tracing a relationship in a novel and seeing how its development reveals the characters and their growth

Activity

In these chapters, Janie and Tea Cake's relationship grows and matures. There are many adjectives that can be used to describe a relationship between a man and a wife: loving, trusting, sharing, etc. In a novel, a loving relationship between a man and a wife is often defined through an incident in the story demonstrating this love. For example, a loving husband might show his love for his wife by taking on extra household duties so she can have time to complete her education.

Complete the following chart by citing incidents from Chapters 13 through 17 which define each supplied relationship word. The first one is done for you as an example. After completing the chart, write an explanation of what Janie's relationship with Tea Cake reveals about her growth as a person.

Name: _____

Date: _____

Chapter 17

Characterization

Objectives: Interpreting the thoughts and motivations of the characters
Writing dialogue in dialect

Activity

In Chapter 17, Tea Cake makes a conscious decision to whip Janie. Write a dramatic dialogue between Janie and Tea Cake discussing this whipping, why he did it, and whether or not she feels abused. As well as you can, write the dialogue in dialect, because it may be difficult to capture the essence of the characters without staying true to their speech patterns. It might begin as follows:

Tea Cake: “Ah’m sorry honey, but Ah had to do it.”

Janie: “Why, Tea Cake? ’re yuh tired of me?”

Tea Cake: “It dat Miz Turner. Ah has dis fear in me dat yuh goin’ leave. When Ah whip yuh, ah knows yuh’s mine—yuh ain’t goin’ leave.”

Name: _____

Date: _____

Chapter 18**Significance of the Title****Objective:** Inferring the possible thematic significance of a title**Activity**

The host of a PBS show on books interviews an editor and friend of the author about Chapter 18 of *Their Eyes*. The person playing the moderator should read the chapter closely and prepare questions to ask the editor. The editor should be prepared to answer these and other questions. The rest of the class should also read the chapter closely to prepare additional questions to ask the editor. The audience may challenge the comments of either the moderator or the guest. All readers should first look at the following passage closely to determine its meaning, for one of the first questions may be why the author chose the title *Their Eyes Were Watching God* and what the significance of that title is.

“The wind came back with triple fury, and put out the light for the last time. 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.” (Pg. 160)

Among many others, some questions that might be considered are:

1. What is the role of nature in this chapter?

2. What, if anything, is the relationship between the events in nature and Janie's search for herself?

3. What is the significance of the hurricane and the movement of the Indians and animals?

Name: _____

Date: _____

Chapter 19

Characterization and Plot

Objectives: Involving students in plot and characterization
Evaluating the actions and motivations of characters

Activity

In Chapter 19, Janie is on trial for killing Tea Cake. Janie's testimony to the jury, however, is not included in the text. All the reader knows is that Janie does testify; she wishes she could explain her relationship with Tea Cake to other women instead of the all-male jury; she knows that the African-Americans in the courtroom believe she is guilty.

Give Janie a voice by writing the testimony Janie might have given to the jury of white men. Use Standard English, not dialect.

Write an account of the trial for a newspaper. Remember to keep your style objective and follow the five Ws: Who, What, Where, When, and Why. Be sure to include a headline.

As the editor of the local black newspaper, write an editorial in which you give your opinions on the trial for your readers. Supply a headline.

Name: _____

Date: _____

Wrap-Up**Book Review****Objective:** Writing a book review**Activity**

1. Write a one-hundred word book review for this book, listing the things you liked and disliked about it. Look at the Appendix or the back cover of *Their Eyes* for an example or go to www.amazon.com.
2. Janie tells Pheoby in the last chapter of the book, "Two things everybody's got tuh do fuh themselves. They got tuh go tuh God, and they got tuh find out about livin' fuh themselves." (Pg. 192) Depict this thought pictorially by creating a collage or by drawing a picture. The picture or collage should have captions.
3. The modern African-American author, Alice Walker, searched for Hurston's unmarked grave in Florida. She placed a tombstone on what she hoped was her grave. It has the following inscription: "Zora Neale Hurston/ 'A Genius of the South'/Novelist/Folklorist/Anthropologist/1901-1960" (Pg. xii) Design a different tombstone for Hurston. For the inscription, select a short phrase from the book which, in your opinion, seems to encapsulate her feelings about love.
4. Write a defining poem about two of these topics: nature, love, and prejudice. The sample below will give you the form of a defining poem.

Joy is
The first day of summer vacation
Going to the beach with your friends!
Knocking in the game winning run
Being with the one you love.

5. If you have read *The Bluest Eye* by Toni Morrison, complete this chart.