

Reflections:

A Student Response Journal for...

*Their Eyes Were
Watching God
by Zora Neale Hurston*

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Chapter 1

1. Zora Neale Hurston begins her novel with these words: “Ships at a distance have every man’s wish on board. For some they come in with the tide. For others they sail forever on the horizon, never out of sight, never landing until the Watcher turns his eyes away in resignation, his dreams mocked to death by Time. That is the life of men.” Do you have a dream that seems unattainable, forever just out of reach? Write a letter to the author telling her about your dream. Describe in it what you might do to make the dream attainable.
2. “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.” Is there something in your life you would like to forget or something you want to be sure to remember always? Create a short poem of eight to twelve lines, describing the memory you would like to forget/retain.
3. Janie walks past her old neighbors with only a brief greeting, knowing full well she is going to be the subject of their conversation. Have you had a similar experience in the cafeteria or a school corridor? Write one or two paragraphs, telling a friend how the experience made you feel.
4. Janie sits on her porch with her friend Pheoby “full of that oldest human longing – self revelation.” Have you felt that longing, a need to share something of yourself with someone else? Write a ten-line poem in free verse, expressing how you felt at the time.

Chapter 2

5. Pheoby refers to her porch-sitting neighbors as “zigaboos,” an outdated term of contempt for African-Americans. Use of racial or ethnic slurs in literature is a much-debated topic, often the subject of controversy in newspapers and magazines. Write a letter to the editor in response to a newspaper columnist who argues that such language should never be used. State your reasons why such language should or should not be used.

6. Janie was raised with a family of white children. She thought that she was just like them, until they had their picture taken, and she realized she was “colored.” Have you had an experience in your life where you realized you were different or unique in some way? Write a note to a friend describing the incident. Include how it changed your understanding of yourself.

7. Janie and her Nanny lived in a house on the white employer’s property. Her schoolmates teased her about her absent mother and father and her home. Why do you think they behaved that way toward her? How might she have dealt with them more effectively? Write a paragraph explaining your thoughts on the matter as if you are writing to Janie.

8. Janie engages in romantic daydreams in the springtime garden and ends up kissing Johnny Taylor. She “decided that her conscious life had commenced at Nanny’s gate.” Have you experienced a similar moment in your own life? Describe the experience for your diary or journal.

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9. Nanny had dreams for her daughter that were never realized. She hoped they would be realized in Janie. Grandparents take on special challenges in raising grandchildren. Write a letter to Nanny, giving her some practical advice that might help her to understand Janie better.

Chapter 3

10. Janie asked the question, “Did marriage compel love like the sun the day?” Imagine you are Janie; write an entry in her diary giving her answer to the question after she has married Logan Killicks.
11. Nanny was concerned for Janie’s material well being, but Janie had no use for Logan’s sixty acres. She was looking for something else altogether. Have you ever experienced a longing for something you couldn’t name? Write about your thoughts and feelings as you wrestled with that longing, or if you prefer, express them in a poem.

Chapter 4

12. Logan felt that the problem with Janie was that she had been spoiled both by her grandmother and by him as well. Write a letter to Logan trying to help him understand what Janie was going through and suggesting how he might deal with it.
13. Joe Starks had come to Florida to be a “big voice.” Write a poem expressing Joe’s dreams for the future of black folks in this new Florida he is hoping to build.

Response Journal

14. Imagine that Nanny's ghost comes to Janie in a dream to chastise her about her decision to leave Logan. Develop a dialogue between Nanny and Janie as they contend over her decision. You might begin like this:

Nanny: You know that marriage means forever.

Janie: Maybe before, when you were alive, but...

15. Pretend that Nanny is still alive, and write the note to her that Janie might have left behind, explaining why she left with Joe.

Chapter 5

16. When Coker and Starks discuss Joe Starks' attempt to develop the town, Coker says, "Us colored folks is too envious of one 'nother... Us keeps our own selves down." Write a short e-mail to Coker, expressing your agreement or disagreement with his judgment.
17. Janie is asked to make a speech at the store's grand opening, but Joe dismisses the invitation. "It must have been the way Joe spoke out without giving her a chance to say anything one way or another that took the bloom off of things." Write an entry in Janie's journal, expressing how she feels about this slight and what it has done to her.

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18. After the lamp lighting ceremony, Jody tells Janie he's just getting started. Her reaction is completely different from his: "A feeling of coldness and fear took hold of her. She felt far away from things and lonely." Describe Janie's feelings in a short poem.

Chapter 6

19. In the town, Matt Bonner is the butt of jokes over his mule. He gets flustered and angry each time he is made fun of. Write a letter to the editor of your school paper explaining how teasing or bullying is wrong.
20. Janie writes to you about her frustration in trying to handle the complexities of store transactions. Write her a note in reply, advising her how she might be better able to handle the transactions as well as her feelings.
21. Jody makes Janie wear a head rag in the store without telling her why. In a journal entry, describe his motives for the action, his feelings for Janie, and his jealousy over her.
22. The dragging out of the dead mule becomes a focus of activity for the whole town. Write a brief newspaper account of the day's ceremonies. In the first paragraph, be sure to include the how, when, where, and why of the occasion.