



Their Eyes Were Watching God, by Zora Neale Hurston

In A Nutshell

Zora Neale Hurston wrote *Their Eyes Were Watching God* over seven weeks in Haiti. The novel was published in 1937. Though the novel was written while abroad, Hurston's home base was actually New York, where she played a prominent role in what we now call the Harlem Renaissance – a time of immense literary, musical, and artistic creativity in the black community of Harlem. *Their Eyes Were Watching God* is Hurston's most famous novel. The storyline follows the life of Janie Crawford, a black woman in search of true love and her true self. Both the novel and Hurston were not very well known until 1975, when another African American female writer, Alice Walker, wrote an article entitled "In Search of Zora Neale Hurston." This piece resulted in a renewed interest in Hurston and her writing.

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Big Picture Study Questions

- 1 How does the title "Their Eyes Were Watching God" capture some of the main themes of the book? How do the concepts of God, faith, destiny, or sight tie into the plot?
- 2 In what ways could Janie be read as feminist? Conversely, what weaknesses or flaws might a feminist see in her?

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- 3 Consider the important scene of young Janie underneath the pear tree. Why do you think Janie is so fascinated by the action between the bee and the blossom? What components of this scene (plants, animals, sexual union, love) recur in the novel and where do they repeat? What do you think these things come to symbolize?

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