

Activity 8:

The paperback edition we are using incorporates a Foreword by Mary Helen Washington and an Afterword by Henry Louis Gates, Jr. Use the following questions as a basis for a written notebook in which you respond to these supplementary readings

Foreword

1. The Foreword mentions a cover banner, "Still a Bestseller!" Is *Their Eyes Were Watching God* bestseller material? Support your opinion clearly.
2. Alain Locke, quoted in this foreword, says Hurston created "pseudo-primitives" in this novel. What do you understand this term to mean? To what sections of the novel might he be referring? Do you agree with his term? Again, be sure to support your opinion clearly.
3. Alice Walker is quoted as saying that "while many women had found their own voices, they also knew when it was better not to use it." The remark refers to Janie's silence during her trial. To what degree does this circumstance parallel other circumstances in Janie's life?
4. Mary Helen Washington ends by saying, "... the novel represents a woman redefining and revising a male dominated canon." She continues that such revision needs to be made, and that women have a place in the work. What do you think? Is it possible that even today men have set up the rules defining nature for both men and women? If not, why not? If so, do women still have to insist on a revision? Speak from your own experience and observation.

Afterword

1. Henry Louis Gates, Jr., cites Hurston as embodying a "problematic unity of opposites." He continues with an explanation of why this complexity is interesting in black women especially because it was "generated to establish a maternal literary ancestry."

This question relates especially to question 4 above. Gates continues that black women writers read Hurston "not only for the spiritual kinship...but because she used black vernacular speech and rituals."

Summarize what the spirituality of the novel and the use of the black vernacular speech added to your own appreciation as you read.

2. In Part II of the Afterword, Gates quotes Hurston's term, "the sobbing school of Negrohood" to demonstrate her philosophical difference from Wright's writing, which, she suggests, is a "treatise on sociology."

What other black literature have you read which you would align with the term "the sobbing school"? Do you sympathize with the latter or do you prefer Hurston's "sense of black people as complete, complex, undiminished humanbeings"?

Grading:

1. Clear, in-depth response to each prompt.
2. Understanding of both commentary and novel clearly evident.
3. Correct use of standard English