

*Their Eyes Were Watching God*—Study Guide  
Borrowed from Kristin Bowers, *Secondary Solutions*

Chapter 1

1. What do you think the author means when she says: “Ships at a distance have every man’s wish on board”?
2. Who do you think the “Watcher” is in the first paragraph?
3. What literary device is being used in the phrase: “...mocked to death by Time”? What does this phrase mean?
4. Describe the mood at the beginning of Chapter One. How do the people’s reaction to the woman contribute to the mood?
5. What do we learn about Janie from this chapter? Find at least four examples from the text that describe her either physically or emotionally.

Chapter 2

1. What “discovery” did Janie make about herself when she was very young?
2. Why was Janie raised by her grandmother?
3. Who was Janie’s grandfather (Leafy’s father)?
4. Why did Nanny run away from the plantation?
5. Why did Nanny want Janie to marry Logan Killicks?
6. What happened to Janie’s mother at age seventeen? What happened as a result?
7. What does Nanny mean when she says that she is a “cracked plate”?

Chapter 3

1. What ideas does Janie have about love?
2. What does Janie believe will happen after she and Logan get married?
3. How does Janie feel about her husband?
4. What is Nanny’s advice to Janie when she tells her how she feels?
5. What do you think the narrator means when she says: “She knew the world was a stallion rolling in the blue pasture of ether”?
6. What do you think the narrator means when she says: “Janie’s first dream was dead, so she became a woman”? How does this statement tie in with the claims made in Chapter One that “the dream is the truth”?

Chapter 4

1. How has Janie's marriage to Logan changed since they were first married?
2. What does Logan want Janie to do with the mule he plans to bring back from town?
3. Describe Joe Starks. How does Janie behave when she first meets him?
4. Where does Joe want to go? Why?
5. Why do you think Janie is so attracted to Joe?
6. What happens to trigger Janie's final decision to leave Logan?
7. What expectations does Janie have about her new marriage to Joe?

#### Chapter 5

1. Why do you think the author begins Chapter Five with the sentence "On the train the next day, Joe didn't make many speeches with rhymes to her..." Why is this sentence familiar?
2. What is Janie and Joe's first impression of the town?
3. When Joe realizes what the town is really like, what does he plan to do?
4. What do you think of Amos Hicks and Lee Coker? What do their personalities and behavior tell you about the town?
5. Why do you think Joe Starks is so set upon building a store and a post office? What does this tell you about his personality and motives?
6. How do the townspeople reward Starks?
7. How does Joe treat Janie? What does/doesn't he allow her to do?
8. What is symbolic about the streetlamp that Starks bought?
9. How does Janie feel about her marriage to Joe?
10. How is Janie treated as the Mayor's wife?
11. What is symbolic about the way Starks paints his house?
12. What do the townspeople notice about the way Joe treats Janie?

#### Chapter 6

1. How do the men at the store tease Matt Bonner about his mule?
2. Why is Janie having such a hard time managing the store?
3. Why does Starks buy the mule from Matt Bonner?
4. How is freeing the mule symbolic? To whom do the townspeople compare Starks?
5. Why doesn't Joe allow Janie to go to the "draggin'-out"?

6. After the mule dies, the townspeople begin an entire funeral for the mule. Even the buzzards engage in what hints at a ritualistic ceremony. Why do you think Hurston included this strange ceremony among the buzzards?
7. Why does Joe think that Janie is being ungrateful?
8. According to Sam and Lige, what is it that keeps a man from being burned on the stove? Explain. Who do you think “wins” the argument?
9. What do you think the author meant by “The bed was no longer a daisy-field for her and Joe to play in”?

#### Chapter 7

1. How is Janie able to “tolerate” her relationship with Jody?
2. What does the narrator mean by “For the first time she could see a man’s head naked of its skull”?
3. Why did the narrator say that the incident with the tobacco was “like somebody snatched off part of a woman’s clothes while she wasn’t looking and the streets were crowded”?
4. How old are Janie and Jody now?
5. How does Janie insult Jody about his age? How does Jody react to this insult?

#### Chapter 8

1. Why does Janie feel bad about hurting Joe?
2. What do the townspeople believe Janie has done to Joe?
3. What is wrong with Joe?
4. What does the author mean by: “She was liable to find a feather from his wings lying in her yard any day now”?
5. Why does Janie visit Jody on his deathbed? What does she say?
6. On at least two occasions, Hurston refers to death as “square-toed,” which means exceedingly proper or straight-laced. Why do you think Hurston describes it in this manner?
7. Why is it that one of the first things Janie does after Jody’s death is let her hair down?

#### Chapter 9

1. What do you think the author means by “She sent her face to Joe’s funeral, and herself went rollicking with springtime across the world”?
2. Why does Janie hate her grandmother so much?
3. What does the author mean by “Like all the other tumbling mud-balls, Janie had tried to show her shine”?
4. How have the men been treating Janie since Joe’s death? What is her reaction to these men?

5. What does Janie mean when she says, “Let ‘em say whut deh wants tuh, Pheoby. To my thinkin’ mourning oughtn’t tuh last longer’n grief”? Why is this statement important to Janie and her journey?

#### Chapter 10

1. Where has everyone gone, leaving Janie alone?
2. What is Tea Cake’s real name? Judging from his nickname alone, what kind of person do you think Tea Cake is?
3. How is Tea Cake different from the other men of Eatonville?
4. What is Janie’s reaction to Tea Cake?

#### Chapter 11

1. Why is Janie afraid to appear interested in Tea Cake?
2. What do Tea Cake and Janie do in the middle of the night to “make use of” the moon?
3. What problem do Tea Cake and Janie discuss the next evening at dinner?
4. Janie spends a while that night looking at her eyes, mouth, and hair. What is she looking for?
5. What does the author mean by “He could be a bee to a blossom—a pear tree blossom in the spring”? Who is the “blossom”?
6. How does Janie try to forget about Tea Cake?
7. Who is the “fiend from hell specially sent to lovers”?

#### Chapter 12

1. What rumors have been circulating about Tea Cake and Janie?
2. What does Sam Watson say is the reason Tea Cake is spending money on Janie?
3. What news does Janie tell Pheoby about her and Tea Cake’s future? What is Pheoby’s warning to Janie?
4. Why has Janie decided to sell the store?
5. What do we learn about the way Janie’s grandma wanted Janie to live her life? What does Janie want?

#### Chapter 13

1. What does the author mean by “It was hard to love a woman that always made you feel so wishful”?
2. Why does Janie keep two hundred dollars hidden inside her shirt?
3. Why do you think Janie thought of Annie Tyler and Who Flung?
4. What does Tea Cake do with the money? Do you believe his story? Why or why not?

5. How does Tea Cake plan on paying Janie back?
6. How does Tea Cake get cut?

#### Chapter 14

1. Where does Tea Cake take Janie? Why?
2. What does Tea Cake teach Janie to do?
3. How does Tea Cake convince Janie to take a job? What is her reaction?
4. Describe the mood surrounding the card game at Tea Cake's house?

#### Chapter 15

1. Who is Nunkie, and how does Janie feel about her? Why?
2. What do you think about Janie's reaction to Nunkie and Tea Cake? Is she justified in her actions towards Tea Cake? Why or why not?

#### Chapter 16

1. Why do Janie and Tea Cake decide to stay in the Everglades?
2. What is ironic about the comment, "Her disfavorite subject was Negroes." What does Mrs. Turner have against other African Americans? What does she want Janie to do?
3. Why does Mrs. Turner continue to forgive Janie for her rudeness? How does she justify Janie's (and her own) behavior?
4. What do you think of Mrs. Turner and her beliefs? Justify your response.

#### Chapter 17

1. What is your reaction to Tea Cake whipping Janie to reassure him in "possession"?
2. Why are the men jealous of the way Tea Cake beat Janie? Analyze your thoughts about the men's idea about how to treat a woman.
3. What happened in Mrs. Turner's café? Respond to this incident. Do you think it was an accident or something more?

#### Chapter 18

1. Where are the Seminoles going? Why?
2. What reasons do Tea Cake give Lias for not leaving?
3. How do Tea Cake, Janie, and the others who stayed pass the time waiting for the weather to turn?
4. What does the author mean by "Six eyes were questioning God"?
5. What do you think Janie means by "Ah was fumblin' round and God opened de door"?

6. Finally, the title of the novel appears: "They seemed to be staring at the dusk, but their eyes were watching God." What does this mean in the immediate sense of the hurricane? What does it mean in the larger sense of the book's themes?
7. Why does Motor Boat stay in the abandoned house?
8. How does Tea Cake save Janie from the dog? What happens as a result?
9. What do you think Janie means when she says: "Once upon a time, Ah never 'spected nothin,' Tea Cake, but bein' dead from the standin' still and tryin' tuh laugh"?

#### Chapter 19

1. How are the whites buried? How is this different from the blacks? How do they decide to distinguish between the dead?
2. The "Jim Crow law" is the law which separated whites from blacks in the United States. Under the Jim Crow laws, schools and other public facilities were segregated. What do you think Tea Cake means when he says, "Look lak dey think God don't know nothin' 'bout de Jim Crow law"?
3. How does Tea Cake's personality change once he begins feeling sick?
4. What do we learn about Tea Cake's bite?
5. What makes Tea Cake finally "snap"? What happens as a result?
6. Describe Janie's perspective of the people in the courtroom.
7. What is the jury's verdict? How long does it take them to make their decision? Why is this amount of time important?

#### Chapter 20

1. Why does Janie decide to leave the muck? What does she bring back with her? Why?
2. What does Janie mean when she says, "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"?
3. How has Janie's perspective of life and love changed from the beginning of the story?
4. What do you think will happen next? Will Janie marry again? Why or why not?