



# Their Eyes Were Watching God

Zora Neale Hurston

A lyrical, soul-stirring journey of one woman's search for love, voice, and self under Florida skies. It reads like sitting on a porch listening to the wisest storyteller you know.

**Reading level:** Moderate

**Best for:** A club that loves beautiful prose, big feelings, and meandering, heartfelt conversation

## Discussion

### WARM-UP

1. What was the first passage that made you want to curl up and reread it out loud?
2. If you could pull up a rocking chair on a porch with one character and just listen, who would it be and why?

### DIGGING IN

1. Janie has a special feeling under the pear tree early in the book. Was there a moment in your own life when the world felt that quietly magical?
2. The book is full of community gossip and storytelling. What kind of porch-talk or kitchen-table talk did you grow up around, and did this story bring any of it back?
3. Hurston writes in a rhythm that almost sings. How did reading her language make you feel, and did you find yourself slowing down or reading parts aloud?
4. Janie is searching for a love that feels like her own. What does a truly comforting kind of love look like to you these days?

### GOING DEEP

1. Without giving anything away, was there a stretch of Janie's life that felt especially tender or hard to sit with, and what made it land that way for you?
2. By the closing pages, what feeling did the book leave you carrying around the next day, like a warm coat or a small ache?

## On the table

### **Skillet cornbread with honey butter**

A Southern staple that fits the Florida small-town setting and feels like a hug on a plate

### **Slow-simmered red beans and rice**

Hearty, homey, and easy to make ahead so the host can actually sit and chat

### **Peach cobbler with vanilla ice cream**

Sweet Florida orchards and Southern kitchens in one warm, indulgent bowl

## To sip

### **Spiced sweet tea with lemon and mint (no alcohol)**

A porch-sipping classic, cozy whether iced or warmed

### **Hot chicory coffee with cream (no alcohol)**

A Gulf South comfort, perfect alongside cobbler

### **Bourbon peach toddy**

Warm, honeyed, and a nod to Florida peaches and Southern evenings

## Run of show

**7:00**

### **Soft landing**

Greet guests with sweet tea, soft music, and blankets on the couch. No rush.

**7:15**

### **Supper plates**

Serve cornbread, beans and rice, and let people settle in with full bowls.

**7:40**

### **Warm-up questions**

Pass around the question cards and start with the two warmups.

**8:00**

### **Heart of the talk**

Move into the theme questions, letting tangents and memories wander in.

**8:40**

### **Cobbler and deeper questions**

Bring out peach cobbler and coffee, then ease into the two deep questions.

**9:15**

### **Scorecards and send-off**

Fill out scorecards, share one-word reactions, and hand out bookmarks at the door.

## HOST TIPS

- Read a short favorite passage aloud to set the rhythm of Hurston's language before questions start.
- Keep lighting low and warm; lamps and candles beat overhead lights for this book.
- Let silences breathe. Cozy nights thrive on unhurried pauses between thoughts.

## Playlist

*Front-porch blues, gentle gospel, and slow Southern soul to murmur under the conversation*

01 Trouble of the World - Mahalia Jackson

03 A Sunday Kind of Love - Etta James

05 Walkin' After Midnight - Patsy Cline

07 Harvest Moon - Cassandra Wilson

02 Summertime - Billie Holiday

04 Florida Storm - Blind Joe Reynolds

06 Tupelo Honey - Van Morrison

08 Wade in the Water - Sweet Honey in the Rock

# Trivia

1. In what year was 'Their Eyes Were Watching God' first published? (1937)
2. In which U.S. state is most of the novel set? (Florida)
3. Zora Neale Hurston grew up in what historically significant all-Black town? (Eatonville, Florida)
4. Besides being a novelist, Hurston was trained in what social science? (Anthropology (folklore))
5. Which 1920s cultural movement was Hurston a key figure in? (The Harlem Renaissance)
6. Which contemporary author helped revive interest in Hurston's work in the 1970s with an essay searching for her grave? (Alice Walker)
7. The novel's title is drawn from a phrase suggesting people looking upward toward what? (God / the heavens during a storm)
8. Hurston was born in 1891 in what state, before her family moved to Florida? (Alabama)

## Rate the book

Coziness of the prose ☆ ☆ ☆ ☆ ☆

Characters you'd share a porch with ☆ ☆ ☆ ☆ ☆

Lines worth rereading ☆ ☆ ☆ ☆ ☆

How much it moved you ☆ ☆ ☆ ☆ ☆

Lingering warmth after closing the book ☆ ☆ ☆ ☆ ☆

One word for how this book made me feel: \_\_\_\_\_

A passage I want to keep nearby: \_\_\_\_\_

Someone I want to hand this book to next: \_\_\_\_\_

YOU'RE INVITED

## Porch Light On: A Cozy Night with Janie

Come sit a spell with cornbread, peach cobbler, and Zora Neale Hurston. Soft sweaters and softer hearts encouraged.



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