

Character Based Literacy Program Writing Prompt

Their Eyes Were Watching God, Day 1



Key Passage, p. 1

“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” (p. 1).

Writing Prompt

Hurston used the image of a ship sailing to describe the dreams and hopes of men during the 1930’s. Compared to what you know about life in the 30’s, how have things changed? What has remained the same?

Write a paragraph that argues either for or against the metaphor of a sailing ship describing the dreams of men in our modern society. Is this an appropriate image? How have dreams changed or stayed the same in the last 80 years?

Character Based Literacy Program Writing Prompt

Their Eyes Were Watching God Day 2



Key Passage, p. 14

“Honey, de white man is de ruler of everything as fur as Ah been able tuh find out. Maybe it’s some place way off in de ocean where de black man is in power, but we don’t know nothin’ but what we see. So de white man throw down de load and tell de nigger man tuh pick it up. He pick it up because he have to, but he don’t tote it” (p. 14).

Writing Prompt

During the late 1800’s and early 1900’s, black men and women went from a form of slavery where labor and ownership were key factors to slavery of the mind, where individuals feel trapped by one’s thoughts, as opposed to force. Now, in 2013, we have a black president. A black man is in power, and the dreams of many are no longer on the ships sailing forever into the horizon.

What significant changes have occurred in history that give way to a change that has affected many ethnic groups, not just African Americans? Do you think more change is possible?

Write a paragraph arguing whether or not you believe more change is possible in our society. In that paragraph, describe the vision, plan and effort that need to exist in order for the change to occur.

Character Based Literacy Program Writing Prompt

Their Eyes Were Watching God, Day 3



Key Passage, p. 19

“And, Janie, maybe it wasn’t much, but Ah done de best Ah kin by you. Ah raked and scraped and bought dis lil piece uh land so you wouldn’t have to stay in de white folks’ yard and tuck yo’ head befo’ other chillum at school. Dat was ok when you was little. But when you got big enough to understand things, Ah wanted you to look upon yo’self. Ah don’t want yo’ feathers always crumpled by folks throwin’ up think in yo’face. And Ah can’t die easy thinkin’ maybe de menfolks white or black is makin’ a spit cup outa you: Have some sympathy fuh me” (p. 19).

Writing Prompt

Nanny has worked hard and sacrificed to give Janie a good life. She earned and saved enough money to buy a piece land they could call home. Nanny had a vision and a goal in mind, so she did what she needed to make it a reality. Have you ever wanted something better and have had to save to get it?

Write a paragraph in which you argue in favor for working hard towards a goal. In your own words, describe why the benefits outweigh the costs associated with pursuing your dream. Provide a counterargument, but conclude your paragraph with an argumentative claim.

Character Based Literacy Program Writing Prompt

Their Eyes Were Watching God, Day 4



Key Passage, p. 24

“Ah wants thins sweet wid mah marriage lak when you sit under a pear tree and think. Ah...’

‘Taint no use in cryin’, Janie. Grandma done been long uh few roads herself. But folks is meant to cry ‘bout somethin’ or other. Better leave things de way dey is. Youse young yet. No tellin’ whut mout happen befo’ you die. Wait awhile, baby. Yo’ mind will change” (p. 24).

Writing Prompt

Nanny is hoping that Janie will change her mind about her marriage. Nanny believes that Janie has a distorted view of life, love, and marriage. Nanny has been around a long time and she believes that life is about survival and protection, not love and dreams.

Write an argumentative paragraph either siding with or against Nanny’s advice. What would you choose to do: leave an unhappy marriage, or stick it out? What are the consequences of each action?

Character Based Literacy Program Writing Prompt

Their Eyes Were Watching God, Day 5



Key Passage, p. 32

“A feeling of sudden newness and change came over her. Janie hurried out of the front gate and turned south. Even if Joe was not their waiting for her, the change was bound to do her good” (p. 32).

Writing Prompt

Janie has decided that she cannot live with Logan Killicks any longer. Without thinking and without having a plan of action, Janie leaves in search for a better life

Do you believe that Janie’s decision is ethical? Write an argumentative paragraph that either supports or refutes Janie’s decision. What would you do in this situation? What consequences does this decision bring with it?

Character Based Literacy Program Writing Prompt

Their Eyes Were Watching God, Day 6



Key Passage, p. 39

“Us colored folks is too envious of one ‘nother. Dat’s how come us don’t git no further that us do. Us talks about de white man keepin’ us down! Shucks! He don’t have tuh. Us keeps our own selves down” (p. 39).

Writing Prompt

Hicks and Coker are having a conversation about how there is no one to blame for not succeeding in life. You can only blame other people for so long until you realize the finger should be pointed at yourself.

Write an argumentative paragraph in favor or against the claim “Us keeps our own selves down.” Do you believe that one is solely responsible for personal success? Or are outside factors to blame?

Character Based Literacy Program Writing Prompt

Their Eyes Were Watching God, Day 7



Key Passage, p. 49

“Ah often wonder how dat lil wife uh his makes out wid him, ‘cause he’s uh mad dat changes everything, but nothing done change him” (p. 49).

Writing Prompt

During these last two days, you have read how Joe has become Mayor and built a two-story house. Joe has become financially wealthy and politically active. The town that once had scanty houses has grown. The town is now a TOWN with people, stores, roads, streetlights, and a post office. It appears that Joe has done everything he set out to do; however, do these changes impact the townspeople in a positive or negative way?

Imagine you are a resident of the town. Write an argumentative paragraph in which you claim that the changes Joe has implemented in the town are either positive or negative developments in your life. How do you feel about the changes being made? If you were in power, would you have done things differently?

Character Based Literacy Program Writing Prompt

Their Eyes Were Watching God, Day 8



Key Passage, p. 58

“Abraham Lincoln, he had de whole United States tuh rule so he freed de Negroes. You got uh town and so you freed uh mule. You have tuh have power tu free things and dat makes you lak uh king uh something” (p. 58).

Writing Prompt

Joe is compared to Abraham Lincoln because he bought a mule and let him live the rest of his days in peace. Even though the mule is a lowly beast of burden, after the mule dies, it is given an almost human-like funeral.

Pretend you are Joe. Write an argumentative paragraph to the townspeople describing why you decided to purchase the mule and treat it with respect after it died. Defend your decisions. What does the mule represent to you? What motivated your choices? What is the impact of your decisions?

Character Based Literacy Program Writing Prompt

Their Eyes Were Watching God, Day 9



Key Passage, pg. 72

“Janie stood where he left her for unmeasured time and thought. She stood there until something fell off the shelf inside her. Then she went inside there to see what it was. In was her image of Jody tumbled down and shattered” (p. 72).

Writing Prompt

Janie thought Joe was going to be the man of her dreams; however, Janie finds out that marriage with Joe is a lot different than she imagined. Her image of him is forever shattered in her heart and her head.

Pretend you are Janie. Write an argumentative letter to Joe in which you claim that he has not treated you fairly in your marriage. What was your vision or dream for the marriage when it began? How have things changed throughout the years? What does Joe need to do in order to change and fix the relationship?

Character Based Literacy Program Writing Prompt

Their Eyes Were Watching God, Day 10



Key Passage, p. 86

“Tain’t dat, Jody. Ah ain’t here tuh blame nobody. Ah’m just tryin’ tuh make you know what kinda person Ah is befo’ it’s too late.”

‘Too late?’ he whispered

His eyes buckled in a vacant-mouthed terror and she saw the awful surprise in his face and answered it.

A deep sob came out of Jody’s weak frame. It was like beating a bass drum in a hen-house” (p. 86).

Writing Prompt

Joe believes he can escape death by not dealing with it. Joe was sick with kidney failure and there was nothing anyone could do about it. He could wish it away, but it was too late for him.

What kind of person do you believe Joe to be? In an argumentative paragraph, make a claim concerning Joe’s character. Is he 100 percent bad? How could he have handled things differently? What changes could he have made to this life that would have produced better results? Support your own opinions with evidence from the text to further your argument.

Character Based Literacy Program Writing Prompt

Their Eyes Were Watching God, Day 11



Key Passage, p. 90

“‘Uh woman by herself is uh pitiful think,’ she was told over and again. ‘Dey needs aid and assistance. God never meant em tuh try tuh stand by theirselves. You ain’t been used tuh knockin’ round and doin’ fuh yo’self, Mis’ Starks. You been well taken keer of, you needs auh man’” (p. 90).

Writing Prompt

The people in town believe that Janie needs a man to take care of her. Looking back at the history of women in the United States during slavery, the Civil Rights movement, and present day, do you think much has changed for women?

Write an argumentative paragraph claiming whether or not you believe there have been changes in women’s role in society since the slavery era.

In second argumentative paragraph, write whether or not you believe that there needs to be more change in the role of women. Why do you believe this? Use evidence from the book as well as personal experience and/or outside research to support your claims.

Character Based Literacy Program Writing Prompt

Their Eyes Were Watching God, Day 12



Key Passage, p. 102-103

“No’m. And nobody wouldn’t marry Tea Cake tuh starve tuh death lessen it’s somebody jes lak him—ain’t used to nothin’. ‘Course he always keep hisself in changin’ clothes. Dat long-legged Tea Cake ain’t got doodly squat. He ain’t got not business makin’ hissef familiar wid nobody lak you. Ah said Ah wuz goin’ to tell yuh so yuh could know” (p. 102-103).

Writing Prompt

In the above passage, Hezekiah warns Janie that Tea Cake is poor and not a good man for her. He and others in town believe that Tea Cake is around just to get Janie’s money and nothing more. Janie seems not to mind that Tea Cake has no money and deeply enjoys his company.

Pretend you are Janie. Write an argumentative letter to Hezekiah explaining that Tea Cake is a good person. Be sure to support the fact that you believe that Tea Cake is worthy of your love, time and affection by using evidence from the text as well as personal opinion and insight.

Character Based Literacy Program Writing Prompt

Their Eyes Were Watching God, Day 13



Key Passage, p. 111, 113

“Course she kin do as she please, but dat’s uh good chance she got up with Stanford. De Man’s wife died and got uh lovely place tuh take her to--already furnished. Better’n her house Joe left her...’

‘Still and all Ah ruther be wid Tea Cake.’

‘Well, if yo’ mind is already made up, ‘tain’t nothin’ nobody kin do. But you’s taking’ uh awful chance” (p. 111,113).

Writing Prompt

Everyone in town, including her best friend Pheoby, wants Janie to marry someone of high quality, someone who can offer her something besides the love that Janie wants. Janie has found love, but no one is happy but herself. She is taking a chance by being with Tea Cake, but what is life without taking chances?

Write an argumentative paragraph from Janie’s perspective. Defend your relationship with Tea Cake. Why do you enjoy being around him? What does he offer to the relationship? Does he make you happy?

In a second argumentative paragraph, explain whether or not you believe Janie should be with Tea Cake. Defend your position in your own words. Use evidence from the text, and also feel free to draw on personal experience to support your argument.

Character Based Literacy Program Writing Prompt

Their Eyes Were Watching God, Day 14



Key Passage, p. 128

“Put dat two hundred back wid de rest, Janie. May dice. Ah no need no assistance tuh help me feed mah woman. From now on, you gointuh eat whutever may money can buy yuh and wear de same? When Ah aint got nothin’ you don’t git nothin’...”

He drifted off into sleep and Janie looked down on him and felt a self-crushing love. So her soul crawled out form its hiding place” (p. 128).

Writing Prompt

Janie is worried that she may have been made a fool when she realizes that Tea Cake took her money; however, he is eventually able to return the money. Tea Cake takes a risk by taking Janie’s money and gambling it in the hopes of making more money. However, Janie also takes a risk by opening up her heart and is rewarded with being loved and loving more than she expected.

Do you believe that Tea Cake’s behavior is a sign of things to come? Do you think it foreshadows more reckless behavior? Write an argumentative paragraph claiming that Tea Cake is either a trustworthy or untrustworthy character. Use evidence from the text to support your claim. Does he act out of love or concern for Janie? Or are his motives selfish?

Character Based Literacy Program Writing Prompt

Their Eyes Were Watching God, Day 15



Key Passage, p. 137

‘Whuts de matter heah?’ Janie asked in a cold rage. They sprang apart.

‘Nothin’,’ Tea Cake told her, standing shame-faced.

‘Well, whut you doin’ in heah? How come you ain’t out dere wid de rest?’

‘She grabbed mah workin’ tickets out amah shirt pocket and Ah run tuh git ‘em back,’

Tea Cake explained, showing the tickets, considerable mauled about in the struggle.

Janie made a move to seize Nunkie but the girl fled.

‘You done hurt may heart, now you come wid uh lie tuh bruise may ear! Turn go may hands!’” (p. 137).

Writing Prompt

In life, things do not always appear as they actually are. In today’s reading, Tea Cake is caught in the fields with a woman other than his wife. When Janie asks why they were there, Tea Cake replies that the girl took his working tickets and he was simply trying to get them back. He even shows proof by showing her the mangled tickets.

Pretend you are Janie. Write an argumentative paragraph in which you claim that Tea Cake has deceived you. Use evidence from the text to support your argument. How is your husband’s treatment unjust? How can the two of you work things out? In your paragraph try to use the dialect implemented in the dialogue of this novel. You may draw on your dialect vocabulary word bank for inspiration.

Character Based Literacy Program Writing Prompt

Their Eyes Were Watching God, Day 16



Key Passage, p. 145

“Once she was complaining about the carryings-on at the jook and Tea Cake snapped, ‘Aw, don’t make God look so foolish—findin’ fault wid everything HE made.’

So Mrs. Turner frowned most of the time. She had so much to disapprove of” (p. 145).

Writing Prompt

Mrs. Turner can be described as a “complainer”. She appears to find fault in everything around her. She doesn’t appear to be happy unless she is putting someone else down.

Write an argumentative paragraph in which you argue against Mrs. Turner’s negative attitude. What changes could she make in order to complain less? Is it always better to see the positive in every situation?

Character Based Literacy Program Writing Prompt

Their Eyes Were Watching God, Day 17



Key Passage, p. 152-153

“Ah’m wrong. Ah’m wrong! Y’all tried tuh tell me right and Ah wouldn’t lissen. Ah ain’t mad wid nobody. Just tuh show y’all Ah ain’t mad, me and Sterrett goin’ tuh buy everybody somethin’ tuh drink.’

Monday morning Coodemay and Sterrett stopped by and begged her pardon profusely and gave her five dollars apiece” (p. 152-153).

Writing Prompt

Only after there were broken dishes and broken furniture did Coodemay realize that his behavior was inappropriate and that he should leave. The next day, he returns to apologize and make peace with Mrs. Turner.

Write an argumentative paragraph in which you claim that Coodemay’s behavior was either out of line, or redeemed by the fact that he apologized. Does apologizing ‘wipe the slate clean’? How do you view Coodemay after reading this section of the book? If you were in the situation, how would you have handled it? Provide a counter-argument in your paragraph, but also conclude with a strong statement that backs up your initial claim.

Character Based Literacy Program Writing Prompt

Their Eyes Were Watching God, Day 18



Key Passage, p. 162

“‘Dese people had mo’sense than Ah did,’ Tea Cake said as they dropped to the floor and lay there panting. ‘Us oughta went on wid ‘Lias lak he ast me’” (p. 162).

Writing Prompt

Tea Cake regrets that he and Janie didn’t leave with Lias after being warned that a hurricane is approaching. As a result, they have to fight to stay alive, with death closing in around them. They, along with the rest of people who stayed behind, are frantically trying to stay alive and find high ground to avoid getting caught in the fury of the lake.

Pretend you are Tea Cake, and in the abandoned house you found a scrap of paper and a pencil. Write an argumentative letter to Lias explaining why you were wrong not to follow his advice. What were the unforeseen consequences of your decision to wait? How could things have been different if you decided to leave at the first sign of danger?

Character Based Literacy Program Writing Prompt

Their Eyes Were Watching God, Day 19



Key Passage, p. 170-171

"A huge ditch was dug across the white cemetery and a big ditch was opened across the black graveyard. Plenty quick lime on hand to throw over the bodes as soon as they were received...

'Hey, dere, Y'all! Don't dump dem bodies in de hole lak date! Esamine everyo last one of 'em and find out if they's white or black.'

'Us got tuh handle 'em slow lak date? God have mussy! In de condition they's in got tuh examine 'em? Whut difference do it make 'bout de color? Dy all needs burin' in uh hurry.'

'Got orders from headquarters. They makin' coffins fuh all de white folks. 'Tain't nothing' but cheap pine, but dat's better'n nothin'. Don't' dump no white folks in de hole jus' so'" (p. 170-171).

Writing Prompt

In today's reading, we are introduced to the theme of segregation. While burying the dead, the men must separate the bodies by race so that the white bodies could be placed in coffins, while the black bodies are to stay in the ditch with lime juice over them and then covered with dirt. This is because there were not enough coffins to go around.

Write an argumentative letter addressed to a governmental official at the time of the novel. In this letter state why you believe that this segregation and different burial procedures for black and white folks is unjust or justified. Does the color of one's skin matter after death? Should the white and black bodies be given the same treatment? Write with a formal and impassioned tone.

Character Based Literacy Program Writing Prompt

Their Eyes Were Watching God, Day 20



Key Passage, p. 192

“Now, Pheoby don’t feel too mean wid de rest of ‘em ‘cause dey’s parched up from not knowin’ things. Dem meatskins is got tuh rattle tuh make out they’s alive. Let ‘em consulate theyselves wid talk. ‘Course, talkin’ don’t amount tuh uh hill uh beans when yuh can’t do nothin’ else. Ah listenin’ tuh dat kind uh talk is jus’ lak opnein’ you’ mouth and lettin’ de moon sine own you’ throat. It’s uh known fact, Pheoby, you got tuh go there tuh *know* there” (p. 191).

Writing Prompt

Janie has truly lived a full life. The novel ends where the novel begins: at home in Eatonville. Janie realizes that it doesn’t matter what advice people give you, you must go through obstacles in life to understand the meaning of love, pain, happiness, poverty, wealth, and loneliness, among other things.

Janie believes that in order to understand certain obstacles of life, you have to live them regardless if they come out good or bad. **Write a paragraph arguing whether or not you agree with Janie’s perspective. In your answer, make sure to give 2-3 reasons to support your response.**

Character Based Literacy Program Writing Prompt

Their Eyes Were Watching God, Final Writing Project



Writing Task

In the novel, ***Their Eyes Were Watching God***, Janie Starks, the main character, is on a journey of love and self-discovery. Raised by her grandmother, a former slave, Janie is raised to believe that love and happiness equaled protection and safety. Janie is forced to marry Logan Killicks after she was caught kissing a stranger boy. Janie leaves Logan for Joe Starks. After Joe's death, she leaves town with a man named Tea Cake. On her journey in search of love, Janie must find out who she is and what she is willing to give up in the name of love and personal happiness. How is Janie able to go from a little fair-skinned, long-legged, "good" hair teenager to a woman with life experience? Will the advice and wisdom of her grandmother haunt her and hinder her from reaching true happiness? Janie has a vision of where she wants to go, but she isn't sure of how to get there. Using the passage from the novel on the reverse side and your own ideas, write a 5-paragraph response essay that focuses on the theme of change.

Suggested Writing Format:

- First, describe the physical and emotional hardships Janie has gone through to reach her vision. What is her vision? Define it. Present an argument: why did she create this vision? Was it a product of her surroundings, or were the motives internal?
- Next, write an argument defining the different types of conflict she might face in her journey of change (***man versus society, man versus fate,***). Present an argument: how might she overcome these obstacles? How did she deal with them in the book? How would you have handled them? Support your claims with evidence from the book.
- Finally, argue that the theme of *Change Requires Effort*, and other related character traits, helped Janie overcome the emotional hardships (***man versus himself***) of surviving her past, making her able to enjoy the present. How was effort involved in overcoming these obstacles?