Plot Summary

- Janie returned to Eatonville wearing overalls like a man and hair swinging like a young girl
- Tea Cake died before the opening of the story
- “The sitters” made their judgments:
  - Where’s the money Jody left her?
  - Where did she leave Tea Cake?
  - They figure Tea Cake left her for a younger girl and took her money
  - The women hope to use Janie’s appearance against her in the future
  - Janie’s age is questioned (she’s younger than they assert/hope)
  - Tea Cake was called a “boy” (he was around 30)
- Phoeby bickered with “the sitters” (she is one of them, though, and the term is only one letter short of SISTERS) in an attempt to defend Janie and place herself above them as her friend, walking next to Janie
- “the sitters,” though still hungry for gossip, soften while talking to Phoeby before she followed Janie
- Janie was hungry (literally) and Phoeby obliged, eager for Janie’s story
- Phoeby worried about the judgments of her peers while Janie now cared not at all
- Phoeby learned that Tea Cake was dead while Janie informed her that he treated her better than anyone else ever did
- Janie, growing up with the Washburns, learned that she was black (disappointedly) from a photograph
- Other girl, Mayrella, doesn’t like Janie because of her favorable treatment (hand-me-down clothes, like the hair ribbon, etc.) from white people, which depresses Janie
- Janie didn’t know her parents:
  - She knew (as does everybody) that the bloodhounds were sent for her father, implying he had harmed her mother
  - Janie contrasted this with her understanding that her father was trying to get back to her mother to marry her (nobody ever remembered that part)
  - This, along with living in a white family’s backyard and receiving better treatment than other blacks, really bothered Janie, so Nanny got some land with the help of the Washburns
- Janie let Johnny Taylor kiss her and gained consciousness (like mouth to mouth resuscitation)
  - The pear tree is awake and alive, and Janie wishes to be one with bees swirling round
  - In a state of pubescent confusion, Janie saw Johnny romantically
  - Nanny saw the kiss
- Nanny declared Janie a woman, which Janie tried to deny
- Nanny agreed to marry Janie off to Logan Killicks for her own protection
- Nanny slapped Janie for what she deemed her ungratefulness
- Nanny regreted it and felt pain for both of them (carrying the weight)
- Nanny explained that the white man is at the top and the black woman is at the bottom
- Nanny then revealed that she was raped by her master, impregnated, and beaten by her mistress for her offspring (Janie’s mother)
- Nanny explained that she couldn’t help Janie’s mother but was making great sacrifices to protect Janie, who she felt was another chance for her to succeed
- Nanny told of the war and slaves being finally freed
- Nanny herself never married, though she had plenty of opportunities, because she didn’t want anyone mistreating her child
- She got help from the Washburns
- Ironically, a school teacher raped Leafy (Janie’s mother) and conceived Janie
- Janie’s mother started drinking heavily after Janie was born
- Janie’s mother could not stay in one place, and, according to Nanny, she was still alive, despite Nanny wishing she wasn’t (so she would no longer be troubled)
- Nanny revealed that she saved a great deal to get Janie out of the Washburn’s backyard.
- Her goal was to keep Janie from being a victim of men, both white and black, and to be able to respect herself.
"Their Eyes Were Watching God" by Zora Neale Hurston

Chapters 1 – 2

Metaphor and Symbol List

Ships and Sea =

Horizon =

Time =

Janie’s WORLD =

Feet =

Eyes =

The Sun =

Hair =

Mule-fur-Skin =

God =

Dreams and Wishes =

Mouths, war with words, kisses, laughter, chewing, and a dish =

Darkness =

Nature =

Chicken/bird/feather/plume/wing/rooster =

Dawg/Dog =

Blood =

Ships and Sea (with an eye, a little bit of dreams, darkness, some sweets, and a tiny tree on the horizon beyond a gathering storm):

“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.

Now, women forget all those things they don’t want to remember, and remember everything they don’t want to forget. The dream is the truth. Then they act and do things accordingly” (1).

“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” (17).

“‘Den, one night Ah heard de big guns boomin’ lak thunder (…not the only storm out there…). It kept up all night long. And de next mornin’ Ah could see uh big ship at a distance and a great stirrin’ round. So Ah wrapped Leafy up in moss and fixed her good in a tree and picked mah way on down to de landin’. The
men was all in blue, and Ah heard people say Sherman was comin’ to meet de boats in Savannah, and all of us slaves was free”” (22).

Horizon:

“For others they (wishes) sail forever on the horizon, never out of sight, never landing...” (1).
(Keep looking; it’s out there...and worth mentioning again...)

Time: (with an eye on the developing mouths of the sitters of THE WORLD)

“It was the time for sitting on PORCHES beside THE ROAD. It was the time to hear things and talk. These sitters had been tongueless, earless, eyeless conveniences all day long” (1).
(No one can escape it; don’t worry, now that you’re aware of it, it is on your side...)

Janie’s WORLD:

“But nobody moved, nobody spoke, nobody even thought to swallow spit until after HER GATE slammed behind her” (3).

“No one can escape it; don’t worry, now that you’re aware of it, it is on your side..."

“She searched as much of THE WORLD as she could from THE TOP OF THE FRONT STEPS and then went on down to THE FRONT GATE and leaned over to gaze up and down THE ROAD. Looking, waiting, breathing short with impatience. Waiting for THE WORLD to be made” (14).
“Through pollinated air she saw a glorious being coming up THE ROAD. In her former blindness she had known him as shiftless Johnny Taylor, tall and lean” (14).

“The cooling palma christi leaves that Janie had bound about her grandma’s head with a white rag had wilted down and become part and parcel of the woman. Her eyes didn’t bore and pierce. They diffused and melted Janie, THE ROOM and THE WORLD into one comprehension” (15).

“But somehow she got lost offa DE HIGHWAY and next thing Ah knowed here you was in DE WORLD” (19).

Feet (with ensuing darkness, a few laughs, and a touch of a tree):

“Not the dead of sick and ailing with friends at the pillow and the feet” (1).

“‘Oh, er, Pheoby, if youse ready to go, Ah could walk over dere wid you,’ Mrs. Sumpkins volunteered. ‘It’s sort of duskin’ down dark. De booger man might ketch yuh’” (4).

“‘Aw, pretty good, Ah’m tryin’ to soak some uh de tiredness and de dirt outa mah feet.’ She laughed a little” (5).

“‘Hand me dat wash-rag on dat chair by you, honey. Lemme scrub mah feet.’ She took the cloth and rubbed vigorously” (6).

“Pheoby held her tongue for a long time, but she couldn’t help moving her feet. So Janie spoke” (8).

“‘Ah can’t be always guidin’ yo’ feet from harm and danger. Ah wants to see you married right away” (16).

“The older woman sat bolt upright and put her feet to the floor, and thrust back the leaves from her face” (16). (Yes, I know these leaves are literal, but they also have figurative implications...)

“It was de cool of de evenin’ when Mistis come walkin’ in mah door. She throwed de door wide open and stood dere lookin’ at me outa her eyes and her face. Look lak she been livin’ through uh hundred years in January without one day of spring” (21).

Eyes: (without a lick but a lickin’ and with a wisp of hair)

“She had come back from the sodden and the bloated; the sudden dead, their eyes flung wide open in judgment” (1.)

“That was before the golden dust of pollen had beglamored his rags and her eyes” (14).

“Nanny closed her eyes and nodded a slow, weary affirmation many times before she gave it voice. ‘Yeah, Janie, youse got yo’ womanhood on yuh’” (15).
“She slapped the girl’s face violently, and forced her head back so that their eyes met in struggle. With her hand uplifted for the second blow she saw the huge tear that welled up from Janie’s heart and stood in each eye” (17).

“‘Nigger, whut’s yo’ baby doin’ wid gray eyes and yaller hair?’ She begin tuh slap mah jaws ever which a’way. Ah never felt the fust ones ’cause Ah wuz too busy gittin’ de kivver back over mah chile. But dem last lick burnt me lak fire” (21).

**The Sun:** (and its counterpart on the horizon)

“The people all saw her come because it was sundown. The sun was gone, but he had left his footprints in the sky” (1).

“Janie ate heartily and said nothing. The varicolored cloud dust that the sun had stirred up in the sky was settling by slow degrees” (6).

“‘So Ah got with some good white people and come down here in West Florida to work and make de sun shine on both sides of de street for Leafy’” (23).

**Hair:** (with a touch of honey and a cluster of feathers)

“‘What dat ole forty year ole ’oman doin’ wid her hair swingin’ down her back lak some young gal?—’” (2).

“‘Betcha he off wid some gal so young she ain’t even got no hairs—’” (2).

“The men noticed her firm buttocks like she had grape fruits in her hip pockets; the great rope of black hair swinging to her waist and unraveling in the wind like a plume; then her pugnacious breasts trying to bore holes in her shirt” (2-3). (*Great personification!*)

“‘So when we looked at de picture and everybody got pointed out there wasn’t nobody left except a real dark little girl with long hair standing by Eleanor’” (11).

“‘And then she useter put hair ribbon on mah head fuh me tuh wear. Dat useter rile Mayrella uh lot’” (12).

“She saw the terrible agony and the lips tightened down to hold back the cry and desisted. Instead she brushed back the heavy hair from Janie’s face and stood there suffering and loving and weeping internally for both of them” (17).

“‘Come to yo’ Grandma, honey. Set in her lap lak yo’ use tuh. Yo’ Nanny wouldn’t harm a hair uh yo’ head. She don’t want nobody else to do it neither if she kin help it’” (17).

“Janie’s long legs dangled over one arm of the chair and the long braids of her hair swung low on the other side. Nanny half sung, half sobbed a running chant-prayer over the head of the weeping girl” (18).
“But pretty soon he let on he forgot somethin’ and run into mah cabin and made me let down mah hair for de last time’” (20).

**Mule-fur-Skin**: (and some sun, darkness, and a touch of honey)

“When Mules and other brutes had occupied their skins. But now, the sun and the bossmen were gone, so the skins felt powerful and human. They became lords of sounds and lesser things” (1-2).

“’Naw, ‘tain’t nothin’ lak you might think. So ‘tain’t no use in me telling you somethin’ unless Ah give you de understandin’ to go ‘long wid it. Unless you see de fur, a mink skin ain’t no different from a coon hide’” (9).

“So she went on thinking back to her young years and explaining them to her friend in soft, easy phrases while all around the house, the night time put on flesh and blackness” (12).

“’Honey, de white man is de ruler of everything as fur as Ah been able tuh find out’” (17).

“De nigger woman is de mule uh DE WORLD so fur as Ah can see. Ah been prayin’ fuh it tuh be different wid you.

**Chicken/bird/feather/plume/wing**:

“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 things in yo’ face” (24).

**God**: (with a splash of tall nature and a throne)

“’If God don’t think no mo’ ’bout ’em then Ah do, they’s a lost ball in de high grass’” (7).

“’Ah even hated de way you was born. But, all de same Ah said thank God, Ah got another chance. Ah wanted to preach a great sermon about colored women sittin’ on high, but they wasn’t no pulpit for me’” (19).

**Dawg/Dog**:

“’Den they’d tell me not to be takin’ on over mah looks ’cause they mama told ’em ’bout de hound dawgs huntin’ mah papa all night long. Den they’d tell me not to be takin’ on over mah looks ’cause they mama told ’em ’bout de hound dawgs huntin’ mah papa all night long. ’Bout Mr. Washburn and de sheriff puttin’ de blood hounds on de trail tuh ketch mah papa for whut he done tuh mah mama. Naw, dey didn’t talk dat part of it atall. Dey made it sound real bad so as tuh crumple mah feathers. None of ’em didn’t even remember whut his name wuz, but dey all knowed de blood hound part by heart’” (12).
Blood:

“‘De thought uh you bein’ kicked around from pillar tuh post is uh hurtin’ thing. Every tear you drop squeezes a cup uh **blood** outa mah heart. Ah got tuh try and do for you befo’ mah head is cold’” (19).

“‘One hundred lashes wid a raw-hide on yo’ bare back. Ah’ll have you whipped till de **blood** run down to yo’ heels! Ah mean to count de licks mahself. And if it kills you Ah’ll stand de loss’” (21).

Dreams and Wishes: (see “Ships and Sea” above and a kiss below)

“In the last stages of Nanny’s sleep, she **dreamed** of voices. **Voices** far-off but persistent, and gradually coming nearer. **Janie’s voice**. Janie talking in whispery snatchs with a **male voice** she couldn’t quite place. That brought her wide awake. She bolted upright and peered out of the window and **saw** Johnny Taylor **lacerating** her Janie with a **kiss**” (14).

“So she extended herself outside of her **dream** and went inside of THE HOUSE. That was the end of her childhood” (15).

“‘Ah was born back due in slavery so it wasn’t for me to fulfill my **dreams** of whut a woman oughta be and to do. Dat’s one of de hold-backs of slavery. But nothing can’t stop you from wishin’’” (19).

“‘Ah been waitin’ a long **time**, Janie, but nothin’ Ah been through ain’t too much if you just take a **stand on high ground** lak Ah **dreamed**” (20).

“‘Lawd knows where she is right now. She ain’t dead, ’cause Ah’d know it by mah feelings, but sometimes Ah **wish** she was at rest’” (23).

“Don’t keer what it was, she could stop and say a few **words** with us. She act like we done done something to her,” Pearl Stone complained. “She de one been doin’ wrong’” (4).

“Nanny’s **words** made Janie’s **kiss** across THE **GATEPOST** seem like a manure pile after a **rain**” (15).

“Her **speech** was pleasant enough, but she kept **walking** straight on to HER GATE. **THE PORCH** couldn’t talk for **looking**.

Mouths, war with words, kisses, laughter, chewing, and a dish: (and walking with a bee into the darkness)

“They **passed nations through their mouths**. They sat in judgment” (2).

“They made burning **statements** with questions, and killing tools out of laughs. It was mass cruelty. A mood come alive. **Words walking** without **masters; walking** altogether like harmony in a song” (2).

“They scrambled a noisy ‘good evenin’” and left their **mouhts** setting open and their ears full of hope” (2).

“So they **chewed** up the back parts of their minds and **swallowed** with relish” (2).
“Pearl Stone opened her mouth and laughed real hard because she didn’t know what else to do. She fell all over Mrs. Sumpkins while she laughed. Mrs. Sumpkins snorted violently and sucked her teeth” (3).

“She ain’t even worth talkin’ after,” Lulu Moss drawled through her nose. “She sits high, but she looks low” (3).

“Well, Ah see Mouth-Almighty is still sittin’ in de same place. And Ah reckon they got me up in they mouth now’” (6).

“You can tell ’em what Ah say if you wants to. Dat’s just de same as me ’cause mah tongue is in mah friend’s mouf” (7).

“To start off wid, people like dem wastes up too much time puttin’ they mouf on things they don’t know nothin’ about” (8).

“If they wants to see and know, why they don’t come kiss and be kissed? Ah could then sit down and tell ’em things. Ah been a DELEGATE TO DE BIG ’SSOCIATION OF LIFE. Yessuh! DE GRAND LODGE, DE BIG CONVENTION OF LIVIN’ is just where Ah been dis year and a half y’all ain’t seen me’” (8).

“Pheoby, we been kissin’-friends for twenty years, so Ah depend on you for a good thought. And Ah’m talking to you from dat standpoint” (9).

Time makes everything old so the kissing, young darkness became a monstropolous old thing while Janie talked” (9).

“With kissing bees singing of the beginning of THE WORLD!” (14).

“So you don’t want to marry off decent like, do yuh? You just wants to hug and kiss and feel around with first one man and then another, huh?” (16).

“Janie, how long you been ‘lowin’ Johnny Taylor to kiss you?’

‘Only dis one time, Nanny. Ah don’t love him at all’” (18).

“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. Put me down easy, Janie, Ah’m a cracked plate” (24).

Darkness: (and a “hongry” laugh)

“No time to be huntin’ stove wood after dark. Mah mulatto rice ain’t so good dis time. Not enough bacon grease, but Ah reckon it’ll kill hongry” (6).

“They sat there in the fresh young darkness close together” (8).

“So when we looked at de picture and everybody got pointed out there wasn’t nobody left except a real dark little girl with long hair standing by Eleanor. Dat’s where Ah wuz s’posed to be, but Ah couldn’t recognize dat dark chile as me. So Ah ast, ‘where is me? Ah don’t see me.’

“Everybody laughed, even Mr. Washburn” (11).
“Miss Nellie, de Mama of de chillun who come back home after her husband dead, she pointed to de dark one and said, ‘Dat’s you, Alphabet, don’t you know yo’ ownself?’” (11).

“In de **black dark** Ah wrapped mah baby de best Ah knowed how and made it to de **swamp by de river**” (22).

“‘De noise uh de **owls** skeered me; de limbs of dem **cypress trees** took to crawlin’ and movin’ round after **dark**, and two three times Ah heered **panthers** prowlin’ round. But nothin’ never hurt me ’cause de Lawd knowed how it was’” (22).

“‘Ah knowed de place was full uh **moccasins** and other **bitin’ snakes**, but Ah was more skeered uh whut was behind me. Ah hide in dere **day** and **night** and suckled de baby every time she start to cry, for fear somebody might hear her and Ah’d git found’” (22).

“‘But one **day** she didn’t come home at de usual time and Ah waited and waited, but she never come all dat **night**. Ah took a lantern and went round askin’ everybody but nobody ain’t seen her’” (23).

“‘Dat school teacher had done hid her in de woods all **night** long, and he had done raped mah baby and run on off just before **day**’” (23).

“‘And after you was born she took to drinkin’ likker and stayin’ out **nights**’” (23).

**Nature:** (with **honey** and some **flesh kissing**)

*Janie saw her life like a great tree in leaf with the things suffered, things enjoyed, things done and undone. Dawn and doom was in the branches*” (10).

“You know, **honey**, us colored folks is **branches** without **roots** and that makes **things come round** in queer ways. You in particular” (19).

“Janie had spent most of the day under a **blossoming pear tree** in THE BACK-YARD. She had been spending every minute that she could steal from her chores under that **tree** for the last **three** days. That was to say, ever since the **first tiny bloom** had opened. It had called her to come and gaze on a **mystery**. From **barren brown stems** to glistening **leaf-buds**; from the **leaf-buds** to **snowy virginity of bloom**. It stirred her tremendously. How? Why? It was like a flute song forgotten in another existence and remembered again. What? How? Why? **This singing** she heard that had nothing to do with her ears. The **rose** of THE WORLD was **breathing out smell**. It followed her through all her waking moments and caressed her in her sleep. It connected itself with other vaguely felt matters that had struck her outside observation and buried themselves in her **flesh**. Now **they** emerged and quested about her consciousness.

She was stretched on her back beneath the **pear tree** soaking in the **alto chant of the visiting bees**, the **gold of the sun** and the panting **breath of the breeze** when the **inaudible voice** of it all came to her. She saw a **dust-bearing bee** sink into the sanctum of a **bloom**; the **thousand sister-calyxes** arch to meet the **love embrace** and the ecstatic **shiver of the tree** from **root** to **tiniest branch** creaming in every **blossom** and frothing with delight. So this was a **marriage**! She had been summoned to behold a **revelation**. Then Janie felt a pain remorseless **sweet** that left her limp and languid.

After a while she got up from where she was and went over the **little garden field** entire. She was seeking confirmation of the **voice and vision**, and **EVERYWHERE** she found and acknowledged answers. A
personal answer for all other creations except herself. She felt an answer seeking her, but where? When? How? She found herself at THE KITCHEN DOOR and stumbled inside. In the air of the room were flies tumbling and singing, marrying and giving in marriage. When she reached THE NARROW HALLWAY she was reminded that her grandmother was home with a sick headache. She was lying across the bed asleep so Janie tipped on out of the FRONT DOOR. Oh to be a pear tree—any tree in bloom! With kissing bees singing of THE BEGINNING OF THE WORLD! She was sixteen. She had glossy leaves and bursting buds and she wanted to struggle with life but it seemed to elude her. Where were the singing bees for her? Nothing on the place nor in HER GRANDMA’S HOUSE answered her. She searched as much of THE WORLD as she could from THE TOP OF THE FRONT STEPS and then went on down to THE FRONT GATE and leaned over to gaze up and down THE ROAD. Looking, waiting, breathing” (12 – 14).

**Sweets:** (like honey, sugar water, and potatoes...from a lower plant)

“Then Janie felt a pain remorseless sweet that left her limp and languid” (11).

“Ah wanted yuh to school out and pick from a higher bush and a sweeter berry” (13).
"The women took the faded shirt and muddy overalls and laid them away for remembrance. It was a weapon against her strength and if it turned out of no significance, still it was a hope that she might fall to their level some day" (3).

Note the contrast between male (they were ogling her) and female judgments and purposes. "The women took...and laid away for remembrance." The diction of the verb "took" is strong and shows the women attempting to exert power over her ceremoniously, as if a funeral (it is, but not in the way they hope), referencing "the sudden dead" (Tea Cake) in the opening. Their intent is to use her appearance as "a weapon against her strength..." which must be clear, as, even if they are unable to attack her, there is "hope that she might fall to their level someday." This is an impossibility, but everyone needs something to give them hope; theirs is not centered on self, as is Janie's, which is exactly why she will never be at "their level...."
“They sat there in the fresh young darkness close together. Phoeby eager to feel and do through Janie, but hating to show her zest for fear it might be thought mere curiosity. Janie full of that oldest human longing—self-revelation. Phoeby held her tongue for a long time, but she couldn’t help moving her feet. So Janie spoke” (8).

“They sat there in the fresh young darkness close together. Pheoby eager to feel and do through Janie, but hating to show her zest for fear it might be thought mere curiosity. Janie full of that oldest human longing—self-revelation. Pheoby held her tongue for a long time, but she couldn’t help moving her feet. So Janie spoke” (8).

“Pheoby dilated all over with eagerness, ‘Tea Cake gone?’” (8).
“’You answer me when Ah speak. Don’t you set dere poutin’ wid me after all Ah done went through for you!’

She slapped the girl’s face violently, and forced her head back so that their eyes met in struggle. With her hand uplifted for the second blow she saw the huge tear that welled up from Janie’s heart and stood in each eye. She saw the terrible agony and the lips tightened down to hold back the cry and desisted. Instead she brushed back the heavy hair from Janie’s face and stood there suffering and loving and weeping internally for both of them” (17).

Here, the brutality is obvious, as is its origins once Nanny reveals her life of abuse and suffering. When their eyes meet, they are personified and amplified. The tear that takes its stand in Janie’s eyes gives Nanny a glimpse of herself before she was made aware of the cruelties of the world. Nanny also sees Janie fighting her suffering and realizes she is ironically causing harm where she intended to protect. She still needs to protect (or habitually guard herself) Janie by not showing her own pain.

As seen above, Nanny’s tenderness is slowly revealed, as is the fact that she has been bearing the burdens of the real world for them both and still needs to. Below, Nanny’s own suffering rushes to the foreground, as she metaphorically explains to Janie that she wants her to be able to fly unlike she was able to do, which is ironic given that she was just attempting to ground her.

The “spit cup” has biological implications, but the sentiment she is trying to metaphorically relate is that Nanny has been used in this way and reveals that this is the greatest source of her “cracked” nature that also stems from being servile.

“‘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 things 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. Put me down easy, Janie, Ah’m a cracked plate” (24).

Brutal: due to Nanny’s past as an abused slave, she tends to be savagely violent, especially when trying to protect and steer Janie away from danger. Janie and her generation do need to remember what has been endured by those before them.

Tender: Nanny shows gentleness toward Janie and clearly loves her, but she doesn’t understand how the world is changing.

Internally, Nanny feels as though she is easily crushed or bruised; she is fragile because she has faced great abuse in her life and clearly realizes she is considered the lowest form of human.

Also going along with her metaphor, it gives a sense that, like a well-cooked meat, Nanny, at this point in her life, is easily chewed or cut, which was also true of her past as a slave.
"But nobody moved, nobody spoke, nobody even thought to swallow spit until after her gate slammed behind her" (2).

The repetition of “nobody” shows clearly that Janie has reached a level of superiority that can be felt or intuited by “the sitters.” She has rendered them speechless; their talk is something—only at this time day—they clearly relish, as they feel as powerful as lords and God in judging others. The “spit” that is referenced here directly correlates with Nanny’s wish for Janie not to be the “spit cup” of any man, which she has apparently achieved, though she didn’t stay dry along her journey. The image of the gate slamming behind her shows her authority.

The repetition of questions in this section clearly supports her naivete and budding curiosity. Nothing is clear, but she wants to follow her heart. “The rose of the world” is calling for her and she is intoxicated and nearly powerlessly obeying, enjoying its caress. This “rose of the world” also appears to penetrate her flesh, going beyond the physical nature of her self-discovery. Now these comingled feelings are presenting themselves to her consciousness, awakening her in the early stages of her empowerment.

Naïve: Janie lacks worldly experience and understanding, but she refuses to accept that following the precepts of slavery is a part of her awakening. Former slaves like Nanny are naïve to the changing world around them.

Strong: Janie has the force of character, will, morality, and intelligence (much of which results from her freedoms growing up desiring true love, both self and from another) to motivate and enable her to navigate uncharted waters.

"From barren brown stems to glistening leaf-buds; from the leaf-buds to snowy virginity of bloom. It stirred her tremendously. How? Why? It was like a flute song forgotten in another existence and remembered again. What? How? Why? This singing she heard that had nothing to do with her ears. The rose of the world was breathing out smell. It followed her through all her waking moments and caressed her in her sleep. It connected itself with other vaguely felt matters that had struck her outside observation and buried themselves in her flesh. Now they emerged and quested about her consciousness" (13).
Their Eyes Were Watching God by Zora Neale Hurston

Chapters 1 – 2

Literary (Metaphor) Analysis

“But now, the sun and the bossman were gone, so the skins felt powerful and human. They became lords of sounds and lesser things. They passed nations through their mouths” (2).

“They scrambled a noisy ‘good evenin’ and left their mouths setting open and their ears full of hope” (2).

“So they chewed up the back parts of their minds and swallowed with relish. They made burning statements with questions, and killing tools out of laughs. It was mass cruelty. A mood come alive. Words walking without masters; walking altogether like harmony in a song” (2).

“Pearl Stone opened her mouth and laughed real hard because she didn’t know what else to do. She fell all over Mrs. Sumpkins while she laughed. Mrs. Sumpkins snorted violently and sucked her teeth” (3).

“’Well, Ah see ‘Mouth-Almighty’ is still sittin’ in de same place. And Ah reckon they got me up in they mouth now’” (6).

The “sun and the bossman” are the men, black and white. The darkness that follows “sundown” is representative of black women. “[S]kin” is thin but protective; it is also a trophy (of a kill) aesthetically, but functional for protection from the harsh cold. The “mouths” of these “sitters” are their source of power when none other is watching. They, when sitting beside the road, only make it as far to use their mouths, as their feet never hit the road.

At the precipice of the metaphor the absence of “the sun and the bossman,” as they elevate themselves to “lords” of “sounds” at best, leaving out any sign of action, “[t]hey pass nations through their mouths.” This desire is the result of being at the lowest station in their own nation, and they are reaching for a sense of superiority, tasting the thought of fulfillment.

The diction of “scrambled” shows their lack of control and unity, though they do come together to utter a respectful greeting. The formality they use lacks any authority, and “their mouths setting open” show the awe that Janie inspires upon her return, like a resurrection. “Their ears” being “full of hope” show that they feel Janie is superior but hope that she will fall, only to make themselves more comfortable sitting; if she succeeds, they must find courage to venture off to find a complete meal.

In “the back parts of their minds” are these items they have judged will reduce Janie, which is a result of their mastication, to be “swallowed” back into their assumed seated position.

The laughter is a “killing tool;” this metaphor exposes the lack of self-worth by which Janie formerly allowed herself to be victimized. “The sitters” join forces to tear another down. This “mass cruelty” releases hurtful words in chorus against one of their own trying to better herself.

Pearl Stone attempts to conceal her ignorance in a power-play of laughter, which, for someone lacking confidence and strength, would surely serve as a cause to crumble. Sumpkins adds to the attempt to usurp Janie’s silent, dignified authority, known as true independence.

While it would appear they had no effect, Janie does feel their teeth, though she quickly, happily, contentedly moves on to enjoying the company of Phoeby and the ominous darkness approaching the men and whites.