

**English 3H**  
***Their Eyes Were Watching God***  
**Theme analysis**

**What is theme?**

Theme is what a text implies about life or human nature.

A text can have more than one theme.

Theme is the “main” idea of a work; in other words, everything in the text should work together to help communicate that idea. Nothing in the work should logically contradict the theme.

**How do we write a good theme statement?**

Theme statements show what a text implies about life or human nature.

Title + Author + Thematic idea + Statement/message about thematic idea + qualifying clause

Example:

In *Their Eyes Were Watching God*, Zora Neale Hurston shows that tradition is important  
(title) (author) (idea) (statement  
for inclusion in society because those who defy tradition are excluded from participating.  
about the idea) (qualifying clause)

**Model from class (10.18-19)**

Prompt: In *Their Eyes Were Watching God*, who has power over Janie or Tea Cake? Cite a specific piece of evidence from what you read.

My Evidence: Chapter 19

“While Tea Cake was standing and looking he saw two men coming towards him with rifles on their shoulders. Two white men, so he thought about what Janie had told him and flexed his knees to run. But in a moment he saw that wouldn't do him any good. They had already seen him and they were too close to miss him if they shot. Maybe they would pass on by. Maybe when they saw he had money they would realize he was not a tramp.

“Hello, there, Jim,” the tallest one called out. “We been lookin' fuh you.”

“Mah name ain't no Jim,” Tea Cake said watchfully. “Whut you been lookin' fuh me fuh? Ah ain't done nothin'.”

“Dat's whut we want yuh fuh—not doin' nothin'. Come on less go bury some uh dese heah dead folks. Dey ain't gittin' buried fast enough.”

Tea Cake hung back defensively. “Whut Ah got tuh do wid dat? Ah'm uh workin' man wid money in mah pocket. Jus' got blowed outa de 'Glades by de storm.”

The short man made a quick move with his rifle. “Git on down de road dere, suh! Don't look out somebody'll be buryin' you! G'wan in front uh me, suh!”

Tea Cake found that he was part of a small army that had been pressed into service to clear the wreckage in public places and bury the dead.”

My Response:

Theme Statement: In *Their Eyes Were Watching God*, Zora Neale Hurston shows that power ultimately rests in the hands of white men because they can threaten violence without consequences.

The evidence I marked suggests that white men have power over black men through the real threat of violence. They have guns and suggest they will use them; one even “**made a quick move with his rifle.**” In addition, Hurston includes the dialogue to show that one even directly threatens that if Tea Cake’s stands up for himself, “somebody’ll be buryin” him.

Tea Cake says that money in his pocket could make him less vulnerable because it shows that he is “**not a tramp,**” which suggests that proof of income is something that those in power value. Tea Cake is passive in his acceptance of the power structure, which is clear when Hurston writes that “**he found that he was a part of a small army that had been pressed into service.**” We should also realize that this is the only chapter that shows direct contact between white and black people in the novel, so that relationship is only one of the power structures Hurston shows to develop the message that in race relations in the book, whites have the power. She includes this passage near the end of a novel that has much more thoroughly examined race relations within the black community, which were more important to the characters. She also spends most of the book looking at the power structures within the black community, primarily through Jody’s power in Eatonville, the informal power structures within relationships and the loose power structure on the muck in the Everglades.