JUMP AT THE SUN

by Kathleen McGhee-Andersen

Teacher's Study Guide

Alive & Aloud • Radio Plays for Learning in the Classroom

Dear Participating Teacher, Winter 1999

We are pleased to provide you this Study Guide as part of our educational program **ALIVE & ALOUD: Radio Plays for Learning in the Classroom**. It is our hope that the enclosures will support your classroom lesson plans for all your students—wherever they are on the learning continuum. Using the educational materials to prepare the students to listen to the radio play will deepen the educational value of the theatre experience.

We lost Zora Neale Hurston for a while, yet she knew that she would outlast her critics and all the obstacles working against her novels, short stories and commentaries. In **JUMP AT THE SUN** by Kathleen McGhee-Anderson, we come to understand the blazing talent that drove Hurston to sacrifice so much for her writing. Her intensity, her curiosity about the world and people, and ultimately her courage teach us about the historic beauty of African American culture through the eyes of a great American literary figure.

You may want to experiment with various approaches to integrating **ALIVE & ALOUD** into your lesson plans. Students can listen to the audio plays individually with their own headset, in a group setting or on their own time outside of class. You may find that certain Study Guide exercises and activities require group listening in teams of students or with the class as a whole. Dividing the play into sections to focus on one part at a time can enhance group listening to the plays.

The Study Guide emphasizes the curriculum core subjects of secondary schools. It is organized to pose important questions and to develop significant study units inspired by the content of the play. These curriculum ideas are our way of promoting academic achievement and enriching the learning process of young people in the classroom.

Sincerely,

Susan Albert Loewenberg

JUMP AT THE SUN by Kathleen McGhee-Anderson
Director, Robert Robinson
Executive Producer, Susan Albert Loewenberg

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Alive & Aloud
Radio Plays for Learning in the Classroom

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·Teacher's Study Guide·

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Zora Neale Hurston

All my life it seems that all I wanted
was for people to hear the sound of my
voice. And I've asked myself why?
This need for a voice. It has cost me
everything. I've fought. Loved. Given
up love, tossed it away. Had money.
Lived grand. Shed tears. Risked my
life. Lied. Given up those most dear. All
for a voice. Yet all my life I've known
that one day I'd find myself in some
lone arctic wasteland. With no one
under the sound of my voice. Along the
way I've met cold, desloate silences. I
studied people all around me.
Searching for someone to help me fend it
off. But there was no one. The agony
was certain. It was before me. And no
one could spare me my pilgrimmage. I
had to go the way. To have a voice…I
must go the way.

–Zora Neale Hurston in Jump At The Sun

What is it About Zora?

BY KATHLEEN MCGHEE-ANDERSON

My introduction to Zora Neale Hurston came in a literature class at Spelman College in the '70s. My professor's enthusiasm for Zora transformed ordinary lectures into forays to fascinating literary worlds I had never before experienced. Zora Neale Hurston wrote about women who spoke their minds, were passionate and fearless. Her language was as deeply rich and colorful as the Florida settings she was raised in. Never had an author described people, emotions or events in the language that she did, and I had read and studied the great classics of literature.

Zora spoke to me. She made me believe that a woman of color could not just write, but write something special. Once I discovered her writing, I was even more delighted to discover Zora herself, a woman whose life reads as vividly as does Janie's, the heroine of her greatest novel, *Their Eyes Were Watching God*. Zora's work and her life enhance each other and should be studied simultaneously. Reading *Dust Tracks on a Road*, her autobiography, and *Mules and Men*, one of her many anthropological studies, enhance and inform her short stories and novels. Zora collected folktales, driving her roadster on the back roads of Florida, talking to country folk, listening to their tales and recording them. After learning about her collecting exploits, Zora becomes more than author, but heroine as well, an adventurer and guide—a brave, wise, visionary able to preserve a vanishing storytelling tradition.

The literary quest that Zora pursued for publication, respect and survival as an author is the story that every budding writer should read, especially women. The odds against Zora, a poor black girl from Eatonville, Florida, were great, yet she overcame them to create a rare body of work. To know Zora and her work is to experience a unique American voice and to know that brilliance is not bound by class, gender or color. Zora's triumph gave me the courage to write. I discovered her in a classroom and she has been with me ever since, fueling me to continue finding my voice. Knowing her pain and insecurity bolsters my often-flagging discipline and dedication to my work. As Zora herself so aptly put it, "There is no agony like bearing an untold story inside you." I thank her for helping me get mine out and for her many beautifully-told and brilliant ones.

Biography

Zora Neale Hurston

(1891-1960)

"You jump. Jump at the sun, Zora.
You reach it for me."
—Zora's mother

JUMP AT THE SUN is a theatrical biography of Zora Neale Hurston, a woman of sparkling wit and enthusiasm, a "genius of the South" who defies simple definition. She charted a new course as a woman growing up with the 20th century, and she lived the painful and lonely consequences of being an independent thinker.

The power of her writing is startling and the beauty of her descriptions sweeps the reader and listener away. For example, she described the great migration of three hundred thousand African Americans from the South to northern cities by writing:

> "And black men's feet learned roads. Some said good-bye cheerfully...others fearfully, with terrors of unknown dangers in their mouths...others in their eagerness for distance said nothing. The daybreak found them gone. The wind said North."

Zora Neale Hurston did more to preserve the cultural heritage of African Americans than did any other writer of her generation. Besides being the author of seven books and over one hundred short stories, plays, essays and articles, she was the first African American to write a popular book of African American folklore (*Mules And Men*).

Born in January, 1891 (although she often reported different years of birth), Hurston was the seventh child in a family of eight children. Her father John Hurston was a Baptist preacher and the town Mayor. He was known to be a skilled carpenter and a good provider, and he was the strongest man in the village of Eatonville, Florida. Her mother, Lucy Hurston, was the "hard-driving force" in the family. A country schoolteacher when she married at sixteen, she taught all her children to read and write at a time when the majority of African Americans were not literate. She gave the child Zora all the tools she needed for her imagination to soar.

Eatonville, Florida was an unusual Southern town. It was the first incorporated African American community with its own laws, town council and mayor. Growing up in this ethnically homogenous environment, Zora was largely sheltered from racism until she traveled outside of Eatonville and first saw "white people with funny ways." The memories of this childhood emerge again and again in her writings. Her family, the townspeople and

the tales she heard on the porch of Joe Clark's general store instilled a deep respect for the folkways of her people.

Upon the death of her mother, Zora began the time of her "wanderings"—not so much in space and time as in spirit. These years were haunted by alienation from her father and stepmother and struggles with poverty. It was not until she took a job as a wardrobe girl for an actress called "Miss M" that she "observed a career could fill up the empty holes left by love."

She was always determined to enroll in school, knowing an education was essential to her ambition. In 1917, when she entered Morgan High, a high school education was generally unavailable to African Americans. Remarkably, she earned a diploma without her family's support. She attended Howard University, the first African American college located in Washington, D.C, and went on to graduate studies in Anthropology at Barnard College-Columbia University in New York City. In her struggle to survive economic hardships, she was determined to do "something for my soul." For her, becoming an educated writer was the answer.

She excelled at Howard University and her gift for writing was recognized. Just as she was finally running out of money for college tuition, she received an invitation to come to New York City. Charles S. Johnson, founder of the African American magazine called *Opportunity: A Journal of Negro Life*, had published one of Zora's stories. He notified her that she had been nominated for an award that would be presented at a gala dinner organized by the magazine to highlight new, young writers.

Zora arrived in New York on a May evening in 1925 with $1.50 in her pocket and went directly to the awards dinner. She won first place in the short story category and placed second in the playwriting category. Both awards were monetary and came with the promise of future publication. In her first night in New York, she had won $70, launched her writing career and met a new friend, Langston Hughes. Hughes would introduce her to the world of the writers and artists living in the African American community of Harlem. But the artists of the Harlem Renaissance never really accepted Zora's flamboyant lifestyle, and they disapproved of the folksy content and rhythm of her writing.

By the end of the gala awards dinner she had also found employment with Fannie Hurst, a wealthy, well-known writer who hired Zora as her secretary. Eventually, Zora came to live in Fannie Hurst's large house and worked for her in various capacities. Zora was kept so busy that she rarely had time for her own writing. She was living a frantic life, trying to meet Hurst's literary deadlines and studying Cultural Anthropology at Barnard College-Columbia University. Fortune shined upon her once again. In the midst of her career frustrations she learned that one of her professors had recommended her for a fellowship. She won the award from the Negro History Foundation and received a grant to travel the South collecting folktales documenting the oral tradition of Southern African American life.

Before she left New York, she bought a car with part of her grant money and called her old boyfriend at Howard University, Herbert Sheen, to join her in her travels. Once back in her home state of Florida, she and Herbert married. It did not take long before Zora found herself saying, "Being your wife is crushing to my ambition, Herbert..." Herbert wanted Zora to spend more time with him and less time chasing through small towns and villages trying to find the essential conversation that would lead to a precious folktale. The marriage lasted only eight months.

When Zora returned to New York, she was denied a continuation of her grant because she had not collected enough unknown folktales. Lacking any immediate means of making a living, her friend Langston Hughes referred her to his benefactor, Charlotte Mason. Mrs. Mason, white and wealthy, prided herself on cultivating literary protégés from Harlem. She insisted that her "subjects" call her "Godmother," and she supported writers like Zora for years. This dependent relationship provided Zora with the means to develop and produce her writing between 1927 and 1932.

The domination of Mrs. Mason included a contract that allowed her to have editing rights over Zora's folklore writing and an agreement that Zora would not write plays or novels. When Langston Hughes finally broke away from the creative control of Godmother, his relationship with Zora was also broken. They were never to be friends again. Zora's willingness to continue accepting Mrs. Mason's financial and artistic control only compounded the difficulties she had with the famous writers of Harlem. She was the only Southerner among them, and they thought her tales brought "the race down" by promoting racial stereotypes. They discounted her work, saying that her folklore was "too primitive to be considered art."

Only recently has Zora been appreciated for the stories she wrote during her Harlem years. Her talent for weaving African American folk culture into fiction is now recognized for its soaring lyric quality and for the musicality of its language. Her long-lost stories written during this time, *The Eatonville Anthology*, demonstrate Zora's ability to translate stories from her childhood and from her travels through the South into great literature.

Bertran Lippincott of Lippincott Publishing provided Zora with her greatest period of success. He published her first novel *Jonah's Gourd Vine* in 1934, and in 1937, her most famous book, *Their Eyes Were Watching God*.

Zora wrote this love story while grieving over a broken love relationship and traveling through Haiti on a Guggenheim Fellowship. In contrast to many novels published in the '30s that focused on the misery of African American life in America, Zora wrote about a woman's search for happiness. In the Great Depression of the 1930's, this thematic quest for feminine identity and fulfillment was criticized and discarded.

By the 1940's, Zora had moved to a houseboat in Florida, and as the character Zora says in *Jump at the Sun*, "I have been in sorrow's kitchen and licked out all the pots…I want a busy life, a just mind and a timely death." She ended up "cold in hand," a folk term for being broke. She spent the last years of her life penniless, alone and forgotten. The largest royalty check she had ever received from a publisher was $943.75.

Zora died of heart disease on the night of January 28, 1960. In the early '70s, Alice Walker, author of *The Color Purple*, found Zora's unmarked grave in a south Florida cemetery. She cleared the weeds and placed a tombstone there which reads, "Zora Neal Hurston, A Genius of the South, 1901 - 1960, Novelist, Folklorist, Anthropologist." Finally, the beauty and vitality of Zora's storytelling was once again brought to the attention of readers throughout the world.

That Zora's body of literary work was lost to public view for decades is a reflection of how race and politics can suppress great art. In the end, she has become triumphant. *Their Eyes Were Watching God* continues to be in great demand. Her voice, singing the praises of the African American folk ways she held so dear, can be heard clearly now.

I shall return with the earth to father Sun, and still exist in substance
when the sun has lost its fire, and disintegrated in infinity to perhaps become
a part of the whirling rubble in space. Why fear?
The stuff of my being is matter, ever changing, ever moving, but never lost…

–Zora Neale Hurston, Dust Tracks on a Road

Zora Neale Hurston's Their Eyes Were Watching God:

"Tuh de Horizon and Back"

by R. Joyce Lausch

"Ah done been tuh de horizon and back and now Ah kin set heah in mah house
and live by comparisons... Two things everybody's got tuh do fuh theyselves.
They got tuh go tuh God, and they got tuh find out about livin' fuh theyselves."

These are the words of Janie Crawford as she finishes telling her story to her best friend, Pheoby. In Zora Neale Hurston's second novel, *Their Eyes Were Watching God*, Pheoby listens to Janie's tale, the tale of her search for selfhood.

Raised in West Florida by a grandmother who taught Janie security meant happiness, Janie first marries a man much older than she is who owns land and a house. She leaves this farmer, Logan Killicks, for the promise of wealth and status given by a younger and ambitious man, Jody Starks. As Mrs. Mayor Starks of Eatonville, Florida, Janie learns that wealth and status is not the happiness she is searching for. Only after Jody's death can Janie, at forty, find joy in living with Tea Cake, a fun-loving and free-spirited man who cares as much about her happiness as his own. With Tea Cake, Janie journeys to the Everglades of Florida and exchanges the dress and headrag of her life with Jody for overalls and hair swinging free down her back. Janie works as a farm laborer and an equal alongside Tea Cake "on the muck." While Janie and Tea Cake struggle with the black man and black woman roles expected of them by their community, Janie realizes the "horizons" of her life reach beyond her search for a romantic love of mutual respect. Janie's time with Tea Cake ends suddenly and tragically when Tea Cake, bitten by a rabid dog during a hurricane, attacks Janie and she is forced to shoot him or lose her own life. Returning to Eatonville to share her story with Pheoby and the rest of the community, Janie has come to know herself life, love, and respect. She has, indeed, traveled to the "horizons" of life.

Their Eyes Were Watching God was first published in 1937, but for nearly thirty years after this printing it was largely unknown and unread. The novel received mixed reviews when it was first published. Because the characters and plot of *Their Eyes Were Watching God* were inoffensive to a white audience, white reviewers praised it. Janie struggles with race and class, but she struggles more to understand herself as a woman and to understand the intersections of dream and reality in relationships. Nevertheless, because white critics liked the novel, fellow writers of the Harlem Renaissance were suspicious and criticized Hurston for not making struggles of race and class more central to this book.

Hurston's male contemporaries, Richard Wright and Alain Locke, criticized *Their Eyes Were Watching God* because it was not "protest fiction." They believed that Hurston's novel was not serious enough, that it focused too much on entertaining white readers instead of documenting the harsh realities of life for black folk in the South. They interpreted the folklore central to *Their Eyes Were Watching God* as Hurston trafficking in stereotype; Tea Cake, to Lock and Wright, was an embodi-

ment of the gambling, dancing figure of the minstrel tradition.

Additionally, the focus on a powerful, self-reliant black woman searching for her own identity and happiness was unfamiliar in the black literature of Hurston's time. Readers and critics were not used to finding in fiction a black woman speaking her mind, leaving her husbands, desiring treatment as an equal in her relationships with men, and wanting more than security, wealth and status.

A final reason the novel did not receive the attention it deserved in Hurston's lifetime is the fact that her life and politics became more important to her fellow writers than her work itself. Another novel, *Seralph on the Suwanee*, published in 1948 was about poor white Southerners, and other African American writers believed she had betrayed the black people she should have been writing for and about. In the same year, she was accused of committing a sexual act with a young boy. While the accusation was proved false, the effects of the publicity weighed heavily on both Zora Neale Hurston personally and the popularity of her literary work. Hurston's outspoken rejection of desegregation policy—a result perhaps of living in an all-black town for much of her life—may also have worked against her.

Yet *Their Eyes Were Watching God* has become very important in the African American literary tradition and is now studied in high schools, colleges and universities nationwide. Readers recognize and appreciate the power and self-assertion of Janie Crawford. The relationship between Janie and Tea Cake prompts many readers to consider and even question Janie's perception of the relationship as one of mutual respect and love. Women see a model for their own lives in Janie's independence and assertiveness; in demanding her own voice and identity, Janie's experiences celebrate an escape from social convention and community expectations. Readers also recognize the value of the folklore that permeates Hurston's novel and rejoice in Janie's return to her community to share her story, to make sure it gets passed on. Finally, readers appreciate the richness of the descriptive language, the true-to-life dialect of Hurston's characters, and the symbolic imagery of nature in *Their Eyes Were Watching God*.

The revival of Zora Neale Hurston's most highly acclaimed novel was not automatic, but a result of reader demand. First republished in 1965, five years after her death, *Their Eyes Were Watching God* was again out of print by 1975. One primary advocate of Zora Neale Hurston as an important writer and figure of African American womanhood was Alice Walker, author of *The Color Purple*. Walker's advocacy was central to the second republication of *Their Eyes Were Watching God* in 1978. As its popularity has continued to surge, the novel has been continually in print.

The complexity of Zora Neale Hurston's *Their Eyes Were Watching God* continues to prompt a variety of interpretations and scholarship from countless readers. The novel that established a resounding interest in Hurston's life and the body of her works will undoubtedly remain widely read for years to come.

A Poetic Voice of African American Culture

The Life and Work of Langston Hughes (1902-1965)

by Jennifer Loeb

Langston Hughes dedicated his work to revealing to black people their dignity and the beauty of black folk culture. He was on a mission as a writer of social purpose: "I explain and illuminate the Negro condition in America." He cast himself as the companion of black people, a troubadour in the folk tradition like blues singers and jazz musicians. His aim was to record the humor and wisdom of the low-down folk: to transcribe the talk he heard on the tenement stoops, on the southern road; to capture the sounds of the black neighborhood and to honor its music.

Born in Joplin, Missouri in 1902, James Langston Hughes was a "passed around" child. His father, James Hughes, was ambitious and emigrated to Mexico to escape Jim Crow (institutionalized discrimination against blacks) and prospered. His mother, Carrie Langston, was remarried to a man who wandered from town to town in search of work. Hughes grew up mostly with his maternal grandmother Mary in Lawrence, Kansas. An educated woman who traveled with free papers during slavery, she refused to take in washing or cook for whites. She lived in a white neighborhood, rented rooms to students, and belonged to no church because churches were segregated. After his grandmother's death in 1916, books had begun to happen for him, "where if people suffered they suffered in beautiful language, and not in monosyllables, as we did in Kansas." Hughes attended white schools and so came to black folk culture from a distance, through the tales of sacrifice that were his grandmother's lullabies.

The black folk culture that fascinated Hughes was urban, that of blacks transplanted by the great migration from South to North. When he joined his mother and stepfather in Cleveland in 1916, "they seemed to me like the gayest and bravest people possible—these Negroes from the Southern ghetto—facing tremendous odds, working and laughing and trying to get somewhere." His mother worked as a maid to help pay the rent. He flourished at high school among Russian Jews and Polish Catholics. Hughes was also introduced to the dialect poems of Paul Laurence Dunbar and the free verse of Carl Sandburg, his "guiding star."

On a visit to his father in Mexico in 1919–"My father hated Negroes. I think he hated himself, too, for being a Negro"–Hughes contemplated suicide and collapsed from psychosomatic illness. "I hated my father." Still, he went to Mexico the next year to get away from his mother. He began to publish his poems in black journals and magazines, but his father wanted him to study in Europe to become an engineer. His mother wanted him to get a job and forget college. However the rumor of Harlem had reached him. He never saw his father again after he left Mexico later that year. When his father died, Hughes was not mentioned in his will. For his mother's part, whenever her husband started wandering, she would depend on her son for help. She once sold his possessions when he was away. His own family experience often appears in his subsequent work about long-suffering black mothers or the cruelty of white fathers towards their mulatto sons.

Hughes was in and out of Columbia University during the early '20s when he discovered Harlem and began what he called his own life: struggling to find a job as a "colored boy," publishing in black journals and immersing himself in black culture. After graduating from Columbia in 1923, he signed up on a ship, virtually stopped writing, and sailed through African ports, ending up in Europe. He joined the black expatriate set in Paris and worked as a dishwasher in a jazz club. He was robbed in Italy and lived among rough beachcombers until a ship returning to the U.S. that would hire blacks came into view. He returned to Washington, where he worked in a laundry to support his mother.

Hughes' first book of poetry, *The Weary Blues* (1926), which launched his career, elevated the lives of Harlem's elevator boys, ladies' maids, and crap shooters to literary subject matter. Its nude dancers, tom toms, swaying hips, and maidens of the "jazz-tuned night," "sleek black boys in a cabaret" and "dark brown girls in blond men's arms," belong entirely to the Harlem Renaissance. Its language is as syncopated as a jazz composition, its images rich and alive, yet the work does not fail to encompass the dark social realities outside of the cabaret.

Much of Hughes' poetry is grounded in raising social awareness about the black condition. The style is straightforward and declarative in order not to detract from forceful statement. For the most part, it concentrates on the capacity of the black people to endure. He was often controversial, even in non-white circles, with his invocation of Africa and the word "black" back in the days when many blacks described themselves as brown and denied their African heritage. On the other hand, many found his willingness to broach subjects such as miscegenation (interbreeding between members of different races) dangerously frank. Others of his poems fall into the "lyric" category and, written under the spell of the sea, Harlem and Paris, reveal his own inner world and his sense of isolation intensified by traveling.

Hughes discovered immediately that the blues idiom was the language of the black that he wanted to reveal. Black music came north when Langston was growing up, and styles ranging from gospels and spirituals to blues, jazz and be-bop can be found in his work. He once described the mood of blues as one of despondency, but "when the blues are sung people laugh." The blues expressed for him black culture's heritage of warmth, stoicism and incongruous humor, the "ironic laughter mixed with tears, the pain swallowed in a smile." Subjects of his blues poems were: women who swear not to let another "yellow papa" get their last dime, poor boys looking for a boxcar to take them back South, men who carry their meanness and "licker" with them everywhere and blue-gummed women with low-down ways. Hughes was drawn to that aspect of the blues that functioned as affirmative speech, as ritual to ease misery.

Hughes experienced a break with his rich, high-handed patron Charlotte Mason (aka "Godmother") in 1931. She wanted him to conform to her notion of the "Primitive." He went to rest in Cuba, where he knew intellectuals and activists. From there he went to Haiti and was agitated by its poverty and ruined monuments to black aspirations. The economic crisis of the '30s, resentment against Godmother, and his identification with the oppressed in the Caribbean all inspired the anti-capitalist, anti-imperialist poems he began to write in this period. After an extensive reading tour of the Deep South in 1931, his faith in the healing power of the word became aggressive ("Christ is a nigger/ Beaten and black"). Pamphlets of his racial poetry sold like "reefers on 131st Street." At times it was dangerous for him to appear in Southern lecture halls.

Drawn to the Revolution, Hughes went to Moscow in 1932 to work on a film about black America. The film fell through, but he ended up staying on for a year, enjoying the freedom he experienced and the more comfortable living he was able to make as a writer in the Soviet Union. On his return to the States, Hughes lent his famous name to front leftist organizations, took up the cause of the farm workers in Carmel, California and traveled to Loyalist Spain as a correspondent for black newspapers. He was branded as a communist poet, and this began to pose a threat to his career. During this time he founded the Harlem Suitcase Theatre, where he was able to stage the agitprop (theatre designed to agitate political activity) plays that he began to write in the '30s. As he became increasingly involved in leftist politics, a campaign began to be waged against him that forced Hughes to disassociate himself from the left.

World War II gave Hughes an opportunity to rehabilitate his image. His work during these years expressed what he saw as a "need for achievement and triumph, for strength growing out of our racial past," and that black participation in the war would help to speed desegregation. Hughes joined war committees and made broadcasts for the State Department to the Caribbean. But he did not forget the beatings and lynchings that were then common. "I am an American—but I am a colored American." He warned blacks against admiring the Japanese just because they were non-white and applauded America's freedom of speech at a time when the Justice Department was threatening black editors with sedition if they protested too loudly against racism in the military, and when the Red Cross was storing the blood of blacks separately from that of whites.

Hughes had become a subject of interest for the House Special Committee on Un-American Activities by 1938 and was an FBI target beginning in 1940. The campaign against Hughes culminated in 1953 with a subpoena from Roy Cohn. Hughes cooperated as a passive witness and said that the point of view of his poems was inevitable given that he was born poor, colored and "stuck in the mud from the beginning." A man who gets hurt working ought to show the scars, blacks used to say, and Hughes' scars were beginning to show. Nevertheless, he continued to turn out work throughout the '50s and '60s until his death in 1965.

In retrospect, Hughes' vision of Negro life was not as multifaceted as that life actually was. This may help to explain why he recycled plots and characters through his poems, stories and plays. He was not in favor of black literature showing the black neighborhood as a brutal ghetto, a place where blacks were capable of violence towards other blacks and themselves, because to him, it was a literature that devalued his creed of "triumph through the willingness to struggle."

A product of the Negro Awakening, Hughes believed that what he was able to say about blacks had to be said again and again. After all, black life seemed to stay the same the more it changed. A generation of blacks took pride in Hughes' fame, another generation identified with his characters' opinions about the black condition and yet another generation grew up reciting, "What happens to a dream deferred?/Does it dry up/like a raisin in the sun?" As one looks back on Hughes' endurance and singleness of purpose, perhaps it is enough to concede that he wrote not so much for literature as for his audience and the improvement of the social conditions of that audience.

Cast of Characters

Characters	Actors in the L.A. Theatre Works Radio Theatre Production *(in alphabetical order)*
Buddy, Porter, Man, Juice	David Downing
Lucy Ann, Maid, Sadie, Louise Thompson, Callie, Girl	Cyndi James Gosset
Langston Hughes, Bits, John Hurston	Tommy Hicks
Young Zora, Plum	Lamakhosi Kunene
Herbert Sheen	John LaFayette
Waiter, Photographer, Wallace Thurman, Custodian, Clerk	Mark Christopher Lawrence
Boas, Preacher, Lippincott, Landlord	Loren Lester
Zora	Tina Lifford
Godmother	Nan Martin
Fanny Hurst	Marian Mercer
Gene, Professor, Maitre D', Charles S. Johnson, Old Man	Felton Perry
Ms. Mimms, Gwen Bennet, Woman, Delilah, Effie	Esther Scott

Suggested Vocabulary

arrogant

assertion

boisterous

compelling

compromising

destitute

dogmatic

flamboyant

impression

intellectual

individuality

mercenary

outlandish

pugnacious

renaissance

scintillating

segregation

unique

unpredictable

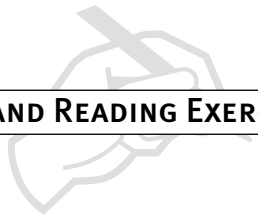
vibrant

vivid

vulnerable

Core Curriculum Support

Activities for the Development of
Critical Thinking, Writing, Listening and Reading



Writing and Reading Exercises

Objectives:

To stimulate interest in writing.
To increase vocabulary development.
To increase ability to organize and express ideas in writing.

1. What do you think were Zora Neale Hurston's most unique qualities as a person and as a writer?

2. No matter how far Zora traveled, she carried her southern Florida way of life inside of her. If you spent your childhood somewhere other than where you now live, describe how you carry those earlier years and memories of a place inside of you.

3. Zora felt unwanted as a child and discriminated against as an African American adult. What do you think kept her going toward her goals? Have you had to overcome obstacles in your life? Explain, give examples.

4. Zora wanted to find her "voice." What did she mean by that? Have you found your voice? How, how not?

5. What were Zora's difficulties in being accepted by her New York, African American, literary friends? What was her reaction to their criticism? Do you agree with her critics? Why, why not? Be specific.

6. Research the source of some of your childhood stories and what country or area of the world they come from. (Examples: fairytales from Northern Europe, myths from Aztec legends, "B'rer Rabbit" tales from the South.) Present your findings in an oral report to your class.

7. When speaking about herself, Zora used an old Florida saying, "I been in sorrow's kitchen and I done licked the pots clean." Describe an experience in your own life that would fit the title, "Sorrow's Kitchen."

8. Find someone in your family to tell you a folktale from their culture. Write it in story form and read it to your class.

9. Young girl: *"Did you see that? A comet blazed clear across the sky."*
   Zora: *"God's changin' a light bulb around up there."*

   How does this type of imagery affect your imagination? What other images/expressions have you heard? (Example: thunder is the sound of the angels bowling.) Can you create some original folkloric images?

10. Research and write a report about two African American women's contribution to the United States.

11. After the abolition of slavery in the 1860's, many African Americans migrated from the South to the North. Find and interview someone in your family or in your community who has migrated. Tell the story of their experience.

12. After listening to the play, discuss the things that Zora did as a woman that were difficult for others to accept. In JUMP AT THE SUN, how is Zora struggling to be heard as a full person? Would Zora face some of the same frustrations today in trying to be understood and accepted? How, how not? Give examples.

13. The folktales that Zora heard and wrote were often over one hundred years old. They were ways that people living in slavery passed on wisdom and important information in secret. The real purpose of the tale was frequently hidden in colorful characters talking fast. Create your own short story that has a hidden message.

14. According to Zora's experiences, a love relationship and traditional home-life would take away from the ambition to be a writer. Do you agree, disagree? Write her a letter giving her your opinion and any advice you care to offer.

15. Education was essential to Zora in her dream of becoming a writer. How do you plan to use your education to reach your goals?

16. Zora's mother was Zora's strongest and most positive influence. Describe the person in your life who you think has had the greatest positive influence in forming who you are and will become in the future. What are the qualities of this person that are so important to you? What is it about your relationship that is most meaningful?

17. Society and communities usually require a degree of conformity from its citizens for acceptance. Zora refused to do anything that inhibited what she thought was right or her ability to make choices both in her personal life and in her writing career. Have you ever wanted to do something that you thought was right but was not accepted by your community? Describe what it was and what you decided to do? What were the consequences? Are you now content with the choice you made? Describe.

Activities

UNIT I:

Interdisciplinary Art Projects

Use the various atmospheres in the play JUMP AT THE SUN
to inspire artistic expression in songs, rituals,
ceremonies, painting, dance and music.



1. Using pictures and words from magazines, construct a collage for each character in the play that describes the essence of his or her personality. Remember that it is not just the individual items or words, but the total feeling of the picture that will provide insight into the personality that you are describing.

2. Construct a collage for and about yourself. Include images that reflect who you are now as well as images that reflect your dreams, hopes and aspirations.

3. Select or compose music that gives an impression of one of the characters in the play. Title it for the character you have chosen. Share your selection with the class, and explain why that particular piece of music and title were chosen.

4. Paint a mural using both abstract and realistic qualities that depict a scene from JUMP AT THE SUN.

5. Study African American paintings that evoke the mood of JUMP AT THE SUN. Create a story that is inspired by the people and/or scenery in one of the paintings.

6. Research rituals and ceremonies commonly practiced in the South in the 19th century by slaves. Choose one and discuss it–does it use elements of dance? Of theatre? How so?

7. What do jazz, gospels, spirituals and blues express about the African American way of life? How do these art forms ease feelings of misery, encourage the will to struggle on? What is the power of artistic expression on the human spirit? Give examples.

Activities

UNIT II:

I Hear You

The essence of each character is caught in things they say.
The dialogue serves to provide insight
into each person's thoughts and motivations.

1. Each of the following quotations is made by one of the characters in JUMP AT THE SUN. Match the quotation to the character who said it.

1. Zora **2.** Mother **3.** Herbert
4. Fannie Hurst **5.** Wally **6.** Godmother

——— *You say you want to write, but it means you want to be loved. It's really love you're after.*

——— *Actually I wanted to be a Congressional Page. But when I got to D.C. I found out I was the wrong color.*

——— *Here we are struggling, starving at it, while she runs around still playing the part of the primitive darky.*

——— *...And if they try to cover the looking glass so my spirit can't linger down here with you, don't let 'em.*

——— *Yes, and this afternoon remind me to dictate a letter to Leonard. The suggestions he made weren't...how shall I put it...*

——— *Perhaps God heard me and wrote down my words in His book... All I've really wanted is for people to hear the sound of my voice...*

2. Select one of the quotations and discuss the qualities of the character. How does the statement give you insights into the person?

Activities

UNIT III:

I Can't Hear You!

In JUMP AT THE SUN, Zora struggles both to find her voice and to be heard. Sometimes she finds that neither the white world nor the African American world understands her or her passion for Southern culture.

1. Divide the class into groups of four or five students. Give each group a problem to be solved. Have all the students talk at once about the problem and its solutions. (No one is to listen to anyone else.)

   What are the frustrations? What is the difference between "hearing" and "listening"? Do parents listen to or hear their children? How can teachers hear or listen to students? What about students hearing or listening to teachers and members of their family?

2. Why did Zora have such a difficult time being heard? Write her a letter giving her ideas about what she can do to improve her communication with the people around her.

3. Do you think the way Zora lived her life scared people? How, how not? How does fear make it difficult for people to hear one another? How do you think prejudice makes it difficult for people to hear one another?

4. Imagine you are meeting Zora Neale Hurston. Describe a conversation with her discussing when you too have felt that people are not hearing you. Tell her about your frustration and let her know how you understand her struggle. Be creative and write in dialogue form.

Activities

UNIT IV:

Acting Out

Explore some of the essential elements of JUMP AT THE SUN.

1. Ask students to act out the times, environments and emotions that make them feel unheard. Discuss constructive ways of handling the frustration, the feeling of loneliness.

2. In the play, we learn that Zora's mother had the strongest influence on her, urging her to "jump at the sun," strive for the highest goals while being herself. Ask students to take turns acting out the most important advice they have received regarding their future. Scenarios will probably have a great variety. Discuss the decisions the student plans to make because of this advice.

3. Organize the class into teams of two or three students. Ask each team to prepare a class presentation; each team member recites a monologue about their most unique quality and the positive and negative effects of this personal quality on their life. Then, the team member(s) pantomimes what they have just heard. How was the communication? Did the student making the presentation feel "heard," understood?

Teacher's Guidelines for Further Study

UNIT I:

Rituals From Africa in American Life

While Zora Neale Hurston worked as a folklorist she collected tales from the South and the West Indies which made her keenly aware of her people's African heritage. At the turn of the last century when Zora was born, the children and grandchildren of former slaves were still very affected by this heritage. As time went on, many ancestral customs seemed to be lost except in folktales. But were they, or did they simply slip into the American way of life?

Trace rituals found in American life today
which are rarely recognized as having originated in Africa.

1. In what ways have the African roots of American citizens been responsible for creating what is unique to American culture?

2. Discuss the development of American music and dance. Be specific about what direct links there are to Africa (e.g. musical instruments, rhythms, styles of dance, etc.)

3. What about the American manner of speaking? Are there words and expressions that may be linked to Africa? How have our language and general mode of communication been affected?

4. Research and discuss common religious practices here and in Africa. Look particularly at prayers and practices of worship. Which American religions are tied most closely to Africa?

5. Explore other North and South American cultures that have been influenced by African traditions; include Jamaica, Haiti, Cuba, Brazil and Peru.

Teacher's Guidelines for Further Study

UNIT II:

Art Projects and the Harlem Renaissance

Zora Neale Hurston was given a key to enriching her writing style when she joined the Harlem Renaissance in New York and was sent to travel the South as an anthropologist and folklorist.

Research the Harlem Renaissance as inspiration for artistic expression.

1. Research the painters of the Harlem Renaissance.

2. Listen to songs that were popular during the Harlem Renaissance. Explain to the class why you are drawn to a particular piece of music.

3. Choose a poem, painting and song from the Harlem Renaissance that most closely reflects your dreams and hopes.

4. Create a class magazine of original student poems. Study poets of the Harlem Renaissance for ideas about artistic individuality.

Major Literary Works

BY ZORA NEALE HURSTON

fiction

JONAH'S GOURD VINE
SERALPH ON THE SUWANEE
THE EATONVILLE ANTHOLOGY
THEIR EYES WERE WATCHING GOD

folklore

MOSES, MAN OF THE MOUNTAIN
MULES AND MEN
TELL MY HORSE

memoirs

DUST TRACKS ON A ROAD

theatre

MULE BONE: A COMEDY OF NEGRO LIFE
(WITH LANGSTON HUGHES)

Bibliography

Jump at the Sun, by Kathleen McGhee-Anderson is available in manuscript from L.A. Theatre Works. To receive a copy, send $5.00 (shipping & handling included) to: L.A. Theatre Works: 681 Venice Blvd., Venice, CA 90291.

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Contributions of Black Women to America, Volume 1 - 2; Davis, Marianna W.; Kenday, Press, Columbia, S.C. 1982.

Encyclopedia of Black America; Low, Augustus & Clift, Virgil; McGraw-Hill, New York, 1981.

From Plantation to Ghetto; Meier, August and Rudwick, Elliott; Hill and Wang, New York, 1970.

I Love Myself When I Am Laughing and Then Again When I Am Looking Mean and Impressive; Walker, Alice, (Editor); The Feminist Press, New York, 1979.

In Search of Our Mother's Gardens; Walker, Alice; Harcourt Brace Jovanovich, New York, 1983.

New Essays on Their Eyes Were Watching God; Awkward, Michael, (Editor); Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1990.

Sorrow's Kitchen: The Life and Folklore of Zora Neale Hurston; Lyons, Mary E.; Charles Scribner's Sons, New York, 1990.

Zora Neale Hurston: A Literary Biography; Hemenway, Robert; University of Illinois Press, Chicago, 1977.

Zora Neale Hurston: An Annotated Bibliography and Reference Guide; Davis, Rose Parkman; Westport, Conn.: Greenwood Press, 1997.

Zora Neale Hurston: Critical Perspectives Past and Present; Gates, Henry Louis, Jr. and K.A. Appiah, (Editors); New York; Amistad, 1993.

Resources on the Internet

http://www-hsc.usc.edu/~gallaher/hurston/hurston.html

- list of Hurston's works with dates
- very short synopses of *Their Eyes Were Watching God*, "Spunk" and most all of her other writing
- pictures

http://www.as.wvu.edu/~ginsberg/sweat.html

- detailed analysis of plot, characters and symbolism in Hurston's story "Sweat"

http://longwood.cs.ucf.edu/~zora/

- official web page of the Zora Neal Hurston Festival of Arts and Humanities, an annual event in Eatonville, FL
- highlights of past years' festivals
- registration materials and brochure available every October;
  send SASE to: Zora Neal Hurston National Museum of Fine Arts
  227 East Kennedy Blvd.,Eatonville, FL 32751 email: zora@cs.ucf.edu

http://www.nku.edu/~diesmanj/harlem.html

- introduction to the Harlem Renaissance
- texts of poems by Langston Hughes, photo
- texts of Hurston's short stories, "Spunk" and "Black Death"
- texts of stories and poems of other Harlem Renaissance writers (Countee Cullen, Angelina W. Gimke, Jessie Redmon Fouset, Anne Apencer, etc.)
- essay, "The Negro Today," by Marion Vera Cuthbert (1896-1989) with footnote of the text of the 14th Amendment (1869) to the U.S. Constitution of the USA
- essay, "The Equal Rights League," by Ida B. Wells-Barnette (1862-1931)
- information on the painters of the Harlem Renaissance
- links to other sites on the Harlem Renaissance

http://www.princeton.edu/~jmercado/harlem/

- web page dedicated to the Harlem Renaissance
- links to many resources exploring New York in the 1920s, artists, bibliographies, etc.
- links to essays about Hurston and many others

http://www.historychannel.com/black98/proindex.html

- brief biography of Langston Hughes as well as other African American historical figures, running the gamut from Frederick Douglas to Billie Holiday to Muhammad Ali to Colin Powell