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Lesson 5

FOCUS: Figurative Language

Janie reads natural phenomena as indicators of her internal landscape. As a result, Hurston's writing is thick with language that draws us beyond the literal descriptions of people, places, and events. Janie describes her life "like a great tree in leaf with the things suffered, things enjoyed, things done and undone."

Identify the novel's figurative language and expand the meaning of the novel. For example, what does Janie mean when she says that her "life is like a great tree in leaf?"

Discussion Activities

Divide your class into groups. Review Chapters 1-5 and list examples of figurative language. Pay special attention to the novel's first page. How are these descriptions used figuratively: the road, ships, trees, the sun, eyes, time, God, dreams, judgment, speech, silence, or mules?

To verify student findings, list each group's images on the board. Ideally, a lively debate will take place as some students may propose examples that might be taken literally.

To expand discussion, use this unit to look at specific types of figurative language such as simile, metaphor, or personification.

Writing Exercise

Whether individually or within the same groups, ask students to find several instances when an image recurs figuratively. What deeper meaning does this repetition suggest?

Homework

Read Chapters 7-9 (pp. 76-93). How does Janie's voice change?