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Lesson 7

FOCUS: Character Development

Many readers consider this novel a *bildungsroman*, or coming-of-age novel, as Janie's external journey takes her through southern Florida and her three marriages. Janie finds her voice and learns to use it. In order to trace the development of Janie's character, use this lesson to explore Janie's transformation at two major turning points: her confrontation with Joe Starks (Chapters 7-8) and her meeting of Tea Cake (Chapter 10).

Discussion Activities

Replay The Big Read CD, Track 1 (12:06-15:42). Listen to Ruby Dee's reading of Janie and Tea Cake's first meeting. Consider Jerry Pinkney's commentary. Notice his illustration in the Reader's Guide on page 14. Is this the way you pictured this scene? Why or why not?

Have students map Janie's development from the young woman under the pear tree to her life as Mrs. Killicks, Mrs. Starks, and Mrs. Woods. How has she changed? How has she remained the same?

Writing Exercise

Have students write two pages to respond to one of these topics. Have them refer to the text to support their conclusions.

1. After Joe's funeral in Chapter 9, Janie faces her hatred of Nanny who "pinched the horizon." Although she sees "mislove" around her, she finds a "jewel" within. What factors allow Janie to rediscover herself? Does her new-found freedom relate to her ownership of property? How does Janie define freedom in her new life?
2. How does Janie feel when she first meets Tea Cake? How is it significant that he teaches her to play checkers? Notice the return of the pear tree symbol on page 106. What does Janie mean when she says Tea Cake is "a glance from God" and has "done taught me de maiden language all over"?

Homework

Chapters 13-16 (pp. 116-146). Reflect upon Janie's new life with Tea Cake. Why does her "soul crawl out from its hiding place"?