

Zora Neale Hurston, *Their Eyes Were Watching God*

1. Analyze the opening paragraphs of the novel (from "Ships. . ." to . . . accordingly.") Here are some suggestions for beginning your analysis. First, **paraphrase the passage - write it out in your own words.** Then focus your essay **on how the passage's component parts create its overall "meaning."** The following questions are not intended to be answered rotely - you'll need to structure your paper according to your thesis about the passage - but they may help you in constructing your analysis. What exactly is being described or discussed? Who is the narrator, and how would you describe the narrator's tone of voice (be precise - think "who or what does this person sound like?")? What kinds of words does the narrator use - long, short, elaborate, funky? What metaphors does the author using, and what are these metaphors supposed to mean, in your opinion? You will also want to comment on the passage's position in the book. It is the reader's "first impression" of the novel; what is it meant to convey about the author, narrator, characters, and the story that is to come?
2. What are the differences in the two distinctive "voices" the narrator uses to tell Janie's story? Describe each of these voices as precisely as you can. What kind of words do they enlist? Which characters speak in them? What do they sound like? What does each "voice" tend to describe? When, precisely, does each voice appear? Why do you think the author decided to use two voices? What does this formal statement mean about the main character, about the book itself?
3. Readers are not treated to direct action in *Their Eyes*: instead, we join with Pheoby to listen to Janie tell her story after it's already happened. Literary critics call the embedding of one story within another story a "frame" - a story encircled or set off by another story. What is the purpose of the narrative frame in this story? What is the significance of one person narrating a story to another? What elements does Janie include in her story, and what does she leave out? How is framing - placing a story within a larger context - related to the position of exile?
4. Who is Pheoby, and what is her role in the story so far? Look up the name "Pheoby" (usually spelled "Phoebe") and write down its meaning. You may also want to look up a related word, "ephebe," and write down its meaning. Why is Janie's listener called this? How do you think the author wants us to regard Pheoby?
5. Chapter 2 opens: "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." Underline or put a check mark next to passages in the first seven chapters concerning trees. What metaphorical significance(s) do trees have in the opening chapters of this book?
6. Look at Nanny's speech to Janie at the end of chapter 2 - the one that ends, "Put me down easy, Janie, Ah'm a cracked plate." What is Nanny telling Janie here? Paraphrase the passage - write it out in your own words.
7. How does Janie leave Logan Killicks? What are her reasons for leaving? Does her behavior make sense to you?
8. On p. 74, read the paragraph that begins "there was something about Joe Starks that cowed the town." In your opinion, what is it about Joe that inspires this reaction in people? Why has Janie married him? At this point in the novel, how is she responding to her position as "wife of the Mayor"?
9. The villagers spend much time telling mule stories. Why is Janey interested in telling us about this mule and the stories that grow up around him? What larger themes or concepts does the mule stand for? Does he remind you of any of the characters - and if so, how and why?

10. Argue for or against: "Tea Cake and Janie have a good marriage." Define what you mean by "a good marriage."
11. *Their Eyes* is essentially a "road story" - the tale of a character who always has one eye on the door. Analyze one of Janie's homes to explain her motives for leaving. What is Janie seeking? Where will she settle - if anywhere - and why?
12. Students familiar with Homer's *Odyssey* might want to compare Janie's homecoming to Odysseus's homecoming at the end of that poem. Hurston, who had a doctorate in folklore and anthropology, was probably consciously aware that she was rewriting a familiar western story. How does she change the story? What remains the same in Hurston's modern version?
13. How is race treated in this novel? What is significant about the racial makeup of the towns and communities Janie lives in? To what extent does Janie feel "exiled" by her race in this novel? (Don't just answer this question off the top of your head; be able to point to textual examples that justify your answer.)
14. Names and naming are important elements of culture. How is Janie, who begins life as "Alphabet," renamed by her culture; who is she at the end of the novel? What do names mean in a culture - what kind of meaning do they confer on an individual?
15. Are there other questions you'd like to discuss about this book? Write them in the space below.

George Orwell, *Nineteen-Eighty-Four*

1. Winston Smith is a familiar figure in literature: the rebel heretic, the nonbeliever who hates his society and passionately desires to overthrow its rulers. What actions constitute rebellion for Winston? Why are these actions viewed as subversive by his government? To what extent is he justified in rebelling - and to what extent is he just causing trouble?
2. Argue for or against: "Winston creates his own position of exile."
3. A "utopia" is an ideal civilization. Taking the viewpoint of an Inner Party member, argue that Oceania is a utopia, explaining how the culture is set up, what is expected of its citizens, and what benefits its citizens may expect to enjoy if they follow the rules. Remember that this paper doesn't necessarily have to reflect your own views. See it as playacting and ask your readers to evaluate it as such. You'll want to adopt the voice of an Inner Party member as fully as possible; listeners may find your paper to be chilling but effective!
4. A "dystopia" is utopia's nightmarish opposite, the culture in which everyday life is hellish beyond belief. Taking Winston's viewpoint, explain how the rules designed to create order and happiness (see question 3) have created the opposite, using specific examples to back up your argument.
5. The thoughts of exiles are dominated by memories of a lost and often unrecoverable homeland or past. Discuss some of Winston's memories and dreams about his former home and family members. When do these memories surface? Why? What do they mean to Winston?
6. Define Julia's philosophy of life and her strategies for coping with Big Brother before her imprisonment. What stereotypes about women does Orwell enlist, and which ones does he reject, in presenting Julia? What, for example, do we know about her outside her relationship to Winston? What are her characteristic gestures and actions? Why do we know her by her first name and Winston by his last?
7. Consider the possibility that Julia is "in league" with O'Brien and the Inner Party from the beginning. What textual evidence can you marshal to support this claim? How does it change your reading of the text?
8. Betrayal is an important theme in this novel. Focus on one or two key betrayers or betrayals, describing and critiquing their act(s) of betrayal. Are there extenuating circumstances for betrayal?
9. Reread the last pages of the novel carefully. What exactly happens to Winston? What textual evidence can you marshal to support your reading? What does the ending seem to encourage us to think about Winston and his story?

**Maxine Hong Kingston, *The Woman Warrior:
Memoirs of a Girlhood Among Ghosts***

"No Name Woman."

1. The narrator's mother opens and closes "No Name Woman" by admonishing her daughter to keep silent about "Father's drowned-in-the-well sister." The narrator also remarks that family traditions are maintained through well-kept silence: "The real punishment was not the raid swiftly inflicted by the villagers, but the family's deliberately forgetting her" (16). Why does the family want to keep this story secret? Why does the narrator's mother decide to break the silence? What do you think of the narrator's decision to publish this story in *The Woman Warrior*? This is liberation or betrayal? Explain.
2. What kind of threat to her community and family does No Name Woman's pregnancy pose? (Be precise in describing this threat.) Which of *the community's* unacceptable emotions and/or ideas does No Name Woman take the blame for? How do you feel about their response to her?
3. Is No Name Woman participating in her own victimization by refusing to expose the baby's father and by drowning herself and her child in the family well? Or is she getting revenge on the village and her family by being "a spite suicide, drowning herself in the drinking water" (16)? What are her reasons for behaving as she does? Are they legitimate, in your view? Explain.
4. Why does the narrator's mother refuse to explain how No Name Woman got pregnant? Why does the narrator, in contrast, offer several possibilities, but refuse to settle on one?

"White Tigers."

5. What does Fa Mu Lan learn during her apprenticeship with the two old people? What is her goal in life, and does she manage to achieve it in the story? What does the narrator learn from Fa Mu Lan's story, and particularly from the words carved on Fa Mu Lan's back? (See the last paragraph in the chapter.) What do the narrator and Fa Mu Lan have in common? (You might want to focus your answer on the passage beginning "My American life has been such a disappointment. . ." [45].)
6. What do the stories of Fa Mu Lan and No Name Woman have in common? What are their goals and dreams? Their achievements? How are they restricted or aided by their cultures? What does the narrator's mother expect her to learn from the stories? What does the narrator *actually* learn (that is, what does she tell us she learns)?

"Shaman" and "At the Western Palace."

7. Connect the encounter between mother and daughter in the closing pages of "Shaman" (100-109) to the story of Brave Orchid that preceded it. What messages are the mother and daughter exchanging? What's the significance of the name "Little Dog," and why is the narrator so glad to be called it?
8. Who is the narrator of the first four chapters of this memoir - the young Chinese-American woman who calls herself "I" or her mother? How can we tell whose viewpoint is designed to prevail in the story - if in fact one is designed to prevail?
9. Brave Orchid does many amazing things in "Shaman" - she gets her medical degree, establishes a traveling medical practice, vanquishes a ghost, witnesses a stoning, buys herself a slave, moves to America to work in a laundry. How does her life square with the "American Dream" of

moving from a limiting "old country" to the "land of opportunity," the United States? What does the daughter learn from the mother's story?

10. What does Moon Orchid hope to accomplish by coming to the United States? When she moves in with her sister's family, what expectations has she brought with her from the old country? How do she and her expectations fit in with the new country? What does the narrator learn from her story?

"Song for a Barbarian Reed Pipe."

11. Why does the narrator attack the young Chinese girl in the bathroom? What does she hope to accomplish? Does she reach her goal? What are some of the consequences of her actions - what does she learn from the experience?
12. What does the narrator mean exactly when she speaks of "ghosts"? (The word has several meanings in this memoir - list as many as you can.) Do you see any connections between these meanings? What do they all have in common? How do they fit in with YOUR definition of the word "ghost"? Why do you think the author has placed "ghosts" at the center of her narrative?
13. In "Song for a Barbarian Reed Pipe," mother and daughter fight over the daughter's developing voice. Several traumatic events in this chapter center around the idea that silence is a kind of violence or death. What are some of the double messages that the daughter has learned from her mother? From both the Chinese and the American cultures that surround her? How is the "Song" of the chapter title connected to the daughter's struggles to learn to speak?

Annie Proulx, *The Shipping News*

Note: Newfoundland is pronounced "new-fun-LAND"; residents are "new-fun-LANDERS." The author's last name is pronounced "Proo."

1. Why does Proulx move Quoye and the family to Newfoundland? What about Newfoundland is appropriate for the Quoye family? What are they seeking there, and to what extent do they find it?
2. How does Proulx contrast the natural world of the sea, land and weather with the shut-in and sometimes dysfunctional world of the isolated Newfoundlanders? How does she contrast the worlds of men and women? Who seems more capable, and why?
3. What do their names tell us about the individual characters? What is Proulx trying to tell us, if anything, with these names? Look up "onomastics" in the dictionary before preparing your answer.
4. Is this a tragic novel or a comic novel? How can you decide? Name your criteria for "tragedy" and "comedy" (look them up!) and focus your response on two or three important incidents or events from the novel.
5. Is Quoye a hero? (Define what "hero" means to *you*.) Why or why not? How is he heroic - or the opposite?
6. Why does the Quoye family decide to emigrate to Newfoundland, and how does the move affect them for good or evil? Discuss how one Quoye family member is affected by the move.
7. How do boats figure in the novel? What does Quoye learn about himself through boats - both his own first boat the one Alvin Yark builds for him, the ones he writes about in the newspaper, Jack's boat? What is the relationship between boats and the theme of exile?
8. Nutbeem tells Quoye: "Have you noticed Jack's uncanny sense about assignments? He gives you a beat that plays on your inner fears" (221). Quoye responds, "Doesn't he do the same thing to himself? . . . It dulls it, the pain, I mean. It dulls it because you see your condition is not unique, that other people suffer as you suffer." What are the inner fears of one main character, and how do they deal with those fears?
9. Proulx credits *The Ashley Book of Knots* for keeping the book from remaining "just the thread of an idea." How does Proulx use the knot motif in the novel (in the chapter epigraphs and throughout)? Notice especially the headings for chapters 2, 4, 28, 32, 33, and 34.
10. What is the difference between house and home in the novel? What is the significance of the old Quoye house and its migration and disappearance? Which characters are "at home" in the novel, and why? How does Proulx play on the tension between staying, leaving, and returning to Newfoundland?
11. Discuss Aunt Agnis's secret life and its relationship to her decisions to move. What is her role in the Quoye family (both the old family and the new family)? What has happened to her? How does she define herself? What is unique about her as a character in this text?

Margaret Atwood, *The Handmaid's Tale*

1. Christianity is an important part of life in Gilead. Find at least ten references to Christianity in *The Handmaid's Tale*, look them up if they are unfamiliar to you, and use them to assemble a precise description of what "Christianity" means to this culture. What principles do Gileadean Christians believe in? How does religion affect people's behavior? What aspects of traditional Christianity do the Gileadeans find useful, and which aspects do they simply reject or leave out? Finally, why is religion so important to the people of Gilead? If religion were unavailable to this society, how would that change social arrangements and expectations? How do you feel about the religion portrayed in this novel?
2. What puns can you detect in the novel's title? What are some of its possible meanings?
3. Two of her friends have a profound affect on Offred: Ofglen and Moira, both of whom are rebels against Gileadean culture. Locate in the text Offred's most important conversations (or mental interactions) with each. Use these textual examples to generalize about the role of the rebel: What do Moira and Ofglen have in common? How are they different? How do they handle themselves? What punishments do they face? What kind of example do they set for Offred?
4. Who is the most "exiled" character in this novel? Who is the least "exiled"? Explain the choice you make, discussing your criteria for making this judgment.
5. Several women in the novel seem to devote their lives to oppressing other women. Focusing on Serena Joy and Aunt Lydia, both of whom have a profound affect on Offred, find several passages or scenes that seem to represent what these women stand for - their ideas, beliefs, and desires. What do you believe motivates them? On what is their status based? What kind of effect do they have on Offred? Can you think of any similar women in our own culture?
6. Why do you think the novel is arranged in such a fragmented form? How do the fragments fit together? Create a brief (1-page) linear summary of the novel, including its most important events and incorporating - into the proper places - any flashbacks or flashes forward that the plot contains. What patterns do you see? Why and how does the author disrupt normal chronological flow of time? How did the fragmentation affect your first reading of the novel? How do you perceive the fragmentation now that you have summarized the novel's action?
7. Atwood has said that she was thinking about *1984* while writing *The Handmaid's Tale*. What do the two novels have in common? How are they different? Where does Atwood change Orwell's stories or themes to fit her different focus? Which novel do you like better, and why?
8. Explain how the "historical note" to the novel fits into the rest of the story. Describe the personalities of the people who are talking and listening. Why are they interested in Offred's tale? What do they hope to gain from it? What about it do they view as important? Finally, why did the author add this to the end of her novel, and how would the novel be changed if it were not there.
9. Find at least ten examples of everyday objects or ideas that are "defamiliarized" - made to seem unfamiliar because they are described differently from what you are used to - in *The Handmaid's Tale*. Why does Atwood choose these particular objects - what do they "mean" in our own late-twentieth century American culture? (For example, a car might be said to stand for transportation, freedom, power, the ability to do what you want when you want.) How does that familiar meaning change in Gilead? Finally, how does this process of defamiliarization make you feel about these things that you usually take for granted?
10. Describe what sex is like in this novel. Locate at least three scenes: one describing "official sex," one describing sex with Nick, and one describing sex with Luke. Grounding your argument

in these scenes (and others that you may wish to use, such as the evening at Jezebel's or Aunt Lydia's comments about sex), explain what sex has meant to Offred at different times. How do you feel about how sex is depicted, including Atwood's calculated use of four-letter words to describe it? What relevance do these depictions have for our own ideas about sex?

11. Study the story of Ofwarren's birthing. What does birth mean in our culture today? What does it mean in Gilead? Conversely, what does "motherhood" mean in our culture? In Gilead? What does Offred think about birthing and motherhood (locate your answers in textual evidence)? Finally, what are the implications of surrogate motherhood - both in your opinion and as Offred describes them?
12. Why is Offred telling us this story? Early on, she tells us: "I would like to believe that this is a story I am telling." Later,, she comments about how she is arranging her story, what its point is, and why she is speaking to us at all. Generalizing from the examples on these pages (and any others you wish to incorporate) explain what happens when someone writes a memoir. What does the story-teller hope to generate from an audience? What is the point of making public - "publishing" - an account of private experience? What does Offred - speaking personally to you as a reader - seem to be asking you to "get" from her story - in other words, is she giving you instructions on how to live your life? Be specific about what instructions seem to be implied by this story.

Peter Høeg, *Smilla's Sense of Snow*

1. An early reviewer of *Smilla's Sense of Snow* said "it's hard to figure out what genre this dense and tantalizing story belongs to--is it a murder mystery, science fiction, morality tale, or an intricately plotted adventure wrapped in a carapace of technical information?" How would you classify *Smilla's Sense of Snow*? What elements of the book fit into the conventions of the genres named above? Does the book include elements of any other genres? Discuss other books you feel are comparable to *Smilla's Sense of Snow*.
2. "The portrait of the woman was very important to me. Writing as a woman is an illusion. It was difficult but it was also fun," Peter Høeg has said. "Longing for a woman is one of the strongest moving forces in the life of a man, so maybe this was an attempt to get closer to a woman, to explore the landscape of a woman." Discuss the above statements. How do you feel about a male author writing from the point of view of a woman? How successful was Peter Høeg in portraying the inner life of his heroine, Smilla? What techniques did he use to make his portrait vivid and realistic? Discuss other books in which a man has written from a woman's point of view--or vice versa. How do they compare to *Smilla's Sense of Snow*?
3. In the course of the novel, Smilla says: "I think more highly of snow and ice than love. It's easier for me to be interested in mathematics than to have affection for my fellow human beings." Is Smilla devoid of feelings or is she merely hiding them? What are the causes of her antisocial behavior? If Smilla does not care for other people, why is she telling her story at all? Is she a reliable narrator when it comes to her analysis of her own personality? Do you feel that Smilla genuinely cares for any other characters in the novel? If so, which ones?
4. Discuss Smilla's relationship with her father. What are the causes of the rift between them? Do you feel he deserves the treatment he receives from Smilla? Is there some degree of reconciliation between them in the course of the novel?
5. What impact has Smilla's mother had on her life? How has Smilla dealt with her mother's death over the years? Discuss Smilla's parents as representatives of two different, opposed worlds which Smilla must straddle.
6. Novelist Jane Smiley said: "Høeg understands just how Denmark and the Danish character are representative of a larger European attitude toward the non-European world, and the remote and mysterious Inuit are representative of the destruction and transformation all non-European peoples have suffered at the hands of the most well-intentioned colonizers." Discuss the clash of cultures portrayed *Smilla's Sense of Snow*--specifically, Denmark's exploitation of Greenland and the Inuit, and in general, the conflict between the technological culture of the West and traditional, indigenous cultures. How does Smilla herself symbolize this clash? Discuss parallels to similar culture clashes in the United States and elsewhere. Do you agree with Richard Eder's assessment of the novel in the Los Angeles *Times* as "an anti-colonial thriller"?
7. *Smilla's Sense of Snow* was made into a film. Watch the film carefully. What elements of the book lent themselves to film adaptation? What elements didn't translate well to the screen? How did the filmmakers change the text to create the movie?
8. Discuss the significance of the title *Smilla's Sense of Snow*. What meanings could it have beyond the literal one? What do snow and ice represent to Smilla? To what effect does Høeg use images of, and information about, snow and ice throughout the book?
9. It is rare for a translated book by an unknown foreign author to attain the level of success that *Smilla's Sense of Snow* has achieved in the United States. What factors do you think most contributed to that success? What did American readers identify with in the novel? What does this book have to say to an American audience?

Hanif Kureishi, *My Beautiful Laundrette*

1. Describe the relationship between Johnny and Genghis, focusing your analysis on a few representative scenes. How close are they, and how do you know? How does their relationship affect their relationships with others?
2. What is the relationship between "The Rainbow Sign" and *Laundrette*? Isolate the thesis of each of them, and explain how "Rainbow" adds to your experience of *Laundrette*. What questions does it raise in your mind? Why do you think Kureishi deliberately tosses around terms and concepts that are unlikely to be familiar to non-British readers?
3. Describe your reactions and/or the reactions of other students to the film. How did the film affect you? Were there specific moments in the film that bothered or particularly interested you or the others in the audience? What about this film seemed provoking to you or other people - and WHY? Papers that simply describe reactions without explaining are likely to be unsuccessful.
4. What's the significance of the laundrette as a business for Johnny and Omar to run together?
5. Choose a scene where something important happens and people communicate with each other WITHOUT USING WORDS. How do they get their views and ideas across? What is communicated during the event? How do you know? Why are people refusing to use words to discuss the event?
6. Genghis tells Johnny, "Don't cut yourself off from your own people. Because there's no one else who really wants you. Everyone has to belong," what ironies do you see in his remark? Whom is Genghis (nick)named for? What is his relationship to Johnny? What group does Genghis recognize as "his people"? Do you see any connections or similarities between the characters Omar and Genghis?
7. Given the fact that observant Muslims are not supposed to drink alcohol or take drugs, what is the significance of booze and drugs in *Laundrette*? (Don't simply lapse into "drugs are evil" rhetoric; think carefully about drug prohibitions, and the extent to which people break them, in mainstream American culture as well.) What do you think Kureishi wants us to think about characters who use and/or trade in drugs? Back up your answer with specific examples.
8. What's more important as a theme in this novel: the problematics of homosexual love or the problematics of racism? How can you tell which one is more important? Which one goes more against society? Which one is most problematic in Johnny and Omar's relationship?
9. When Omar brags that the laundrette is about to yield a profit "because I've hired a bloke of outstanding competence and strength of body and mind to look after it with me" (75), is he paying Johnny a compliment? Explain, paying attention to Salim and Zaki's comments at the bottom of the same page about Omar's strategy.
10. What are the various meanings of the verb "screw," and where do the words "unscrew" and "screw" appear in the text? What is "unscrewing"? Write a paper examining the metaphor of screwing/unscrewing and its significance to the rest of the story.
11. Salim and Cherry have a realty business that compels them to evict squatters from untenanted buildings. Sometimes they hire people they refer to simply as "Jamaicans" to do this dirty work for them. They are consequently hated both by their own family members and by squatters like Johnny, who accuse them of "taking advantage of their own people." Do you feel that, within the context of the screenplay, their behavior is ethically sound? You might want to focus your argument on the scenes that surround the idea of "unscrewing."

12. What facilitates Omar's rise from the toenail-clipping dutiful son of the beginning of the play to the smartly dressed, briefcase-carrying businessman of the ending? In what ways does his "rise" confirm or refute British stereotypes of what can be expected of a Pakistani youth? What scenes or moments describe the shift in the balance of power between Omar and Salim? Why, in your opinion, does Omar emerge victorious against his older and better-connected relative?
13. What is Tania's part in this story? Here are some things you might want to consider; focus your answers on specific scenes. What are her feelings toward Omar? Toward Johnny? What point is Kureishi making by including her? What do her fashion statements (wearing of Eastern and Western outfits) say about her attitudes towards her "role"? Why does Tania flash her breasts at the roomful of gathered men? What kind of statement is she trying to make? Does she succeed? Why does she disappear from the railway platform at the end?
14. Explain the connection between love and marriage in *Laundrette*, focusing your thesis on specific textual examples and perhaps contrasting two couples. What criteria do you use to make your judgments? How does the custom of arranged marriage, which is not unusual in South Asian cultures, affect the characters in this novel? What statement(s) is Kureishi making about how love thrives or fails?