A Celebration of African American Oral Tradition in *Their Eyes Were Watching God* by Zora Neale Hurston

by Deborah Samuel
Lamberton High School

Objectives

As a result of this teaching unit, students will:

- Be prepared to read prose in dialect and be familiar with the difficulties in writing in dialect.
- Be familiar with the definition of the blues and see how it is mirrored in Hurston's prose
- See connections between the novel and African American oral traditions, specifically popular folk tales and playing the dozens
- Understand the motivations and controversy of then and now in using black dialect when writing.
- See connections between the text and works of art of the Harlem Renaissance
- Compare the writings in dialect of John Chandler Harris and Charles Chestnutt to that of Zora Neale Hurston

Rationale

Teaching literature written in dialect presents special challenges. Students are mostly unfamiliar with reading non-standard spellings. Even if some have encountered this before, each writer from Mark Twain to Joel Chandler Harris to Charles Chestnutt to Zora Neale Hurston will represent what they hear in an idiosyncratic manner, depending on their individual style and the fact that dialect varies from one location to another and from one time period to another. Despite this hurdle, the reading of *Their Eyes Were Watching God* in a literature class offers the teacher many opportunities. Hurston has incorporated many aspects of African American oral tradition in her novel. I believe the study of her use of dialect, her similarities to the Blues, and her references to folk tales would enrich the lives of our students.

The most frequently accepted doctrine is that the Harlem Renaissance was a movement characterized by a new interest in African and African American culture. Writers, artists, musicians, filmmakers, and even architects inspired one another to new heights of accomplishment. Some have said that black artists declared a new independence, a desire to shrug off the shackles of bondage to the

old ways and to express themselves using the rhythms of their own people. It was a time to celebrate the sound of African-American language, music, folk tales, and people in every artistic arena. Alain Locke declares in his essay "The New Negro" (1925) that "the pulse of the Negro world has begun to beat in Harlem." (1) In fact, there exist many misconceptions associated with Locke's statement. First was the idea that suddenly African Americans were making a significant contribution to American Culture when this has been the case when the first Africans arrived on our shores in chains. The "pulse" has always beaten. Secondly, the "Renaissance" was not restricted to Harlem. Some of the artists most associated with the phrase "Harlem Renaissance" did not even reside in Harlem.

The use of vernacular, the attempt to represent the language as it was truly spoken by African-Americans was highly controversial. Many were more concerned with presenting a picture of their race that would be acceptable to whites. This was a very deliberate decision for Zora Neal Hurston, a woman educated at Barnard and very capable of writing in whatever form she chose. She was rejected by many of her contemporaries for her choice, and only has come to be appreciated in the last few decades. She deliberately chose authenticity and celebration of her ancestry through her use of dialect and writing down what she heard as it was spoken by the actual folk down home. "She called attention to herself because she insisted upon being herself at a time when blacks were being urged to assimilate in an effort to promote better relations between the races. Hurston, however, saw nothing wrong with being black" (2). But this choice could not have been a foregone conclusion for Hurston. People in the United States have always been judged by their speech. When Jimmy Carter was elected President, this was in spite of deeply entrenched prejudice which deems a southern accent as indicative of less intelligence. African Americans who do not master code switching would be hard pressed to find decent employment. Their use of vernacular in a job interview would peg them as at least uneducated if not unintelligent as well. And yet the examples of African American dialect that have entered the realm of standard English are too numerous to count, with speakers rarely cogniscent of the origins of the very words they speak. So for Hurston to consciously choose to tell her story using dialect, to appear to ignore her Barnard University education and her fluency in standard English, was a decision that was not without consequences.

Zora Neale Hurston (1891 - 1960) made her reputation primarily as a folklorist and as a novelist. She is well known for her novel *Their Eyes Were Watching God* which was recently made into a television drama produced by Oprah Winfrey and starring Halle Berry, as well as six other novels, collections of short stories, scholarly articles, poems, plays, and an autobiography she named *Dust Tracks on the Road* (1942). Unlike many of the characters about which she writes, Hurston herself was very well educated. She attended Howard University and Barnard College. While at Barnard, Hurston was recruited by anthropologist Franz Boas to "collect some of this African-American lore, to record songs, customs, tales, superstitions, lies, jokes, dances, and games" (4). Thus Hurston began traveling

through the South. As she explains in *Mules and Men* (1935), one of her two books resulting directly from her research, she began her investigations in Eatonville, Florida where she was born and raised and where people would treat her just as Zora, the girl they all knew, and treat her most sympathetically in her endeavors. About folklore Hurston says,

> Folklore is the boiled-down juice of human living...In folklore, ...the world is a great, big, old serving platter, and all the local places are like eating plates. Whatever is on the plate must come out of the platter, but each plate has a flavor of its own because the people take the universal stuff and season it to suit themselves on the plate. And this local flavor is what is known as originality (5).

Hurston incorporated this "juice of human living" into her writing which was full of references to folk tales and other African American oral traditions, written in an approximation of the language as originally spoken. Her use of dialect is part of her expression of the specialness of being black. "Indeed she felt there was something so special about her blackness that others could benefit just by being around her. Her works, then, may be seen as manifestos of selfhood, as affirmations of blackness and the positive aspects of black life" (6).

There was to be none of writing to impress or please a white audience for Hurston, even despite the existence of a white patron. She would not try to prove her worth by writing strict-formed fourteen lined sonnets in iambic pentameter as would some of her contemporaries. She did not have the same "sense of mission of rehabilitating the race in world esteem from that loss of prestige for which the fate and conditions of slavery have so largely been responsible" that Alain Locke puts forth in his essay "The New Negro" (7). Nor was she seeking what Locke called "that reevaluation of the Negro which must precede or accompany any considerable further betterment of race relationships" (8). She even manages a swipe at her contemporary W.E.B. DuBois who concerned himself with the "duty of black America" (3). In her novel *Jonah's Gourd Vine* she remarks, "Whut did dis DuBois ever do? He writes up books and papers, hunh? Shucks! dat ain't nothin', anybody kin put down words on uh piece of paper. Gimme da paper sack and lemme see dat pencil uh minute. Shucks! Writing! Man Ah thought you wuz talkin' 'bout uh man whut had done sumpin" (148).

Hurston was certainly not the first to use dialect in literature. Interestingly, despite the controversial aspects of Hurston's writing, she was following in the footsteps of a long-established movement in American Literature which sought greater realism in its depiction of its uniquely American characters. Mark Twain preceded her by scores of years. In *The Adventures of Huckleberry Finn*, "Huck's radical decision to 'up and tell the truth' despite the 'resks' epitomizes the stylistic and thematic transformations shaping American literature during the second half of the nineteenth century. A new commitment to the accurate representation of

American life as it was experienced by ordinary Americans infused literature with a new 'realist' aesthetic"(9). Part of this realistic representation was to mimic the way people actually talked.

We see Joel Chandler Harris, born in 1848, writing his tales of Uncle Remus, Tar Baby and Br'er Rabbit. He claimed to have transcribed tales of black folks just as they were told to him, and he was praised in his day for their accuracy and authenticity even as he presented the stereotype of the contented slave. Also, like Twain, who makes the white boy Huck the main focus of his novel, placing the slave Jim, a grown man, in a secondary role, "at no point does [Harris] turn the narrative over to Remus for longer than it takes the old man to tell and embellish a tale or two" (10). Harris, in fact, was a strong proponent of white supremacy and perpetuating the myth of the idyllic Southern plantation where whites are benign and parental and slaves are loyal to their white masters and happy. There is no intention to preserve the power of the oral tradition inherent in these tales. Harris is portraying the myth of the happy plantation while lynchings are occurring on a regular basis. As Callahan explains, the

> storytelling practiced by Harris' Uncle Remus has little to do with the political perspective of Negro Americans after the Civil War. When Harris elevates culture above politics, he insulates his myth of the South...from the politics of terror and disenfranchisement and the emerging social and political rituals of lynching and race riot. He does not acknowledge or understand that African-American oral culture...was deeply committed to a politics of radical change. (11)

Nonetheless, Joel Chandler Harris is an historic figure in the move toward a realistic representation of characters through the use of dialect.

Charles Chestnutt, born in 1858, continued the pattern of writing in dialect with his publication of *The Conjure Woman.* Chestnutt was light skinned enough that he could have passed for white. In fact, the publishers of his first work did not bother to publicize his race. However, he later chose to champion his race, speaking often of the problems facing blacks of his day, including the fact "that one drop of black blood tainted him and to Whites regardless of what he aspired to be, he would always be a nigger" (12). Like Harris before him, Chestnutt uses the device of combining a white speaker of standard English in dialog with a black speaker of African American dialect. Unlike Harris, however, he uses his tales to overcome stereotypes rather than perpetuate them. Chestnutt strives to debunk the mythology of the Southern plantation and to display a diversity of life among African Americans. Chestnutt is doing so in a "low-key, understated, unthreatening but always savvy voice...[to] persuasively indict slavery and affirm the principle of human equality" (13).

Hurston is anything but understated. There is no intervening white character to whom her black characters must talk. There is no attempt to explain black folks to

a white audience. Her attempt to record an authentic dialect as spoken by actual African Americans, to incorporate their stories, their music, and life as it is really lived by what Langston Hughes called "the low-down folks," seems to break with what had come before. It was not to be a continuation of the caricatures of black people and their speech seen hundreds of times in this country. Hurston lived in the era of minstrel shows and black-faced, white-lipped actors on stage and in the movies. It was the era of Al Jolson, a Jewish American immigrant, similarly made up to sing about his mammy in the first talkie "Jazz Singer." As George Schyler says in his essay "The Negro-Art Hokum," first published in 1926, "the mention of the word 'Negro' conjures up in the average white American's mind a composite stereotype of Bert Williams, Aunt Jemima, Uncle Tom, Jack Johnson, Florian Slappery, and the various monstrosities scrawled by cartoonists" (14). In her "Characteristics of Negro Expression," Hurston explains,

"Everyone seems to think that the Negro is easily imitated when nothing is further from the truth...If we are to believe the majority of writers of Negro dialect and the burnt-cork artists, Negro dialect is a weird thing, full of 'ams' and 'Ises.' Fortunately, we don't have to believe them. We may go directly to the Negro and let him speak for himself"(15).

The oral tradition is central to the experience of African Americans. "Its music and tales testifies to an indomitable will able to overcome the brutalizations of slavery and project possibilities of citizenship based on democratic equality" (16). The environment of slavery forced subversive means of communication, with one story for his master and another for his fellow slave. "Ironically, the dehumanizing conditions of slavery, its prohibitions against literacy, against African language and ritual, reinforced the communal values of the oral tradition" (17). Many other aspects of that oral tradition beyond merely its use of dialect find their way into Hurston's novel. "***Their Eyes*** is a multivoiced, multilayered story-within-a-story which follows an oral-performance model. Hurston uses traditional vehicles of oral self-expression, including blues singing, signifying, and storytelling, to mark important steps in Janie's process of finding her own voice" (18). We see the storytellers on the porch attempting to better one another with one outrageous comment after another - namely, playing the dozens. They are telling mule stories with one character trying to outdo the other.

We also see many reflections of the form of music know as the Blues in *Their Eyes Were Watching God*. This is done in several ways. For example, the traditional Blues stanza has three parts: two lines repeated followed by a third that differs. Similarly, the novel has Janie's three stanzas in the form of her three marriages. The first and the second are a reflection of one another. In each, Janie is following the wishes of her grandmother who wants more than anything to see Janie settled, safe and secure. Janie sublimates her own desires both physically and emotionally to do this. Not until Janie meets Tea Cake does Janie finally follow her heart and her lust. She ignores that he is younger, darker, and less settled than she is, but

she just loves him and that is finally enough. In these three marriages, therefore, we get an echo of the form of the blues stanza.

Furthermore, like Hurston's novel, much of the Blues concerns loving and losing one's love and sexual fulfillment. In W.C. Handy's "St. Louis Blues" we see the following two stanzas:

I hate to see the ev'nin' sun go down
Hate to see the ev'nin' sun go down,
'cause my baby, he done left this town

Feelin' tomorrow like I feel today
Feel tomorrow like I feel today,
I'll pack my trunk, make my getaway

When the character Tea Cake seems to have run off with Janie's money, she certainly could have been singing this song. When Janie first runs off with Tea Cake, wouldn't these lyrics of "'T Ain't Nobody's Bizness If I Do" by Porter Grainger / Everett Robbins have suited her perfectly?

There ain't nothing I can do, or nothing I can say
That folks don't criticize me
But I'm goin' to, do just as I want to anyway
And don't care if they all despise me

If I should take a notion
To jump into the ocean
'T ain't nobody's bizness if I do, do, do do

If I go to church on Sunday
Then just shimmy down on Monday
Ain't nobody's bizness if I do, if I do

If my friend ain't got no money
And I say "Take all mine, honey"
'T ain't nobody's bizness if I do, do, do do

If I give him my last nickel
And it leaves me in a pickle
'T ain't nobody's bizness if I do, if I do

Well I'd rather my man would hit me,
than to jump right up and quit me
'T ain't nobody's bizness if I do, do, do do

I swear I won't call no copper

If I'm beat up by my papa
'T ain't nobody's bizness if I do, if I do (19)

Also, like the following Blues song by Memphis Minnie, Hurston uses the bee as a symbol of her sexual fulfillment, the bee that will polinate the pear tree she looks at with longing at the very start of the novel.

The bee image, connected with Tea Cake and with Janie's sexuality in general is an oppositional image found in many blues but most often associated with the work of Memphis Minnie, who recorded several versions of bumble bee blues. Like **Zora Neale Hurston** in the fields of folklore and literature, Memphis Minnie stands out in the history of the blues as a strong player and singer in a field dominated by men, in which women playing the guitar in public was especially taboo (Garon). .. In her bee blues, Minnie articulates the multiplicity--both the pain (the sting) and the pleasure (the honey)--which the bee as lover image suggests:

I got a bumble bee, don't sting nobody but me [2x]
And I tell the world he got all the stinger I need
And he makes better honey, any bumble bee I ever seen [2x]
And when he makes it, Lawd how he make me scream
He get to flyin' and buzzin', stingin' everybody he meet [2x]
Lawd, I wonder why my bumble bee want to mistreat me
Hmmmm, where that bumble bee gone
Hmmmm, wonder where my bumble bee gone
I been lookin' for him, my bumble bee so long, so long
My bumble bee got ways just like a natchal man [2x]
He stingin' somebody everywhere he lay ("New Bumble Bee")

In the first two stanzas of "New Bumble Bee," first the bee's sting then its honey is associated with the singer's sexual pleasure.[sup4] By contrast, the bee's sting is, in verses three through five, associated with the pain of infidelity and abandonment. In verse five the connection between bee and the "mis-treatin' " man is made explicit. The bee image is but one of many forms in which the opposing sides the pain/pleasure--of love appear in the blues. (20)

Has Hurston succeeded in doing what W.E.B. DuBois says must be done by the "Negro novelist[?]...Such a writer, to succeed in a big sense, would have to forget that there are white readers; he would have to lose self-consciousness and forget that his work would be placed before a white jury." (21) This will be a question for my students as we carry on with our unit of study.

This instructional unit will be intended for an Advanced Placement Literature and Composition class comprised of seniors in high school. The primary text will be *Their Eyes Were Watching God*. Students will be unfamiliar with reading in dialect. They will be introduced to the concept of dialect and will practice reading and writing some of their own. We will take a look at three folk tales that are a part of the African American oral tradition, namely the "Signifying Monkey,"

"Stackolee," and the "Sinking of the Titanic." We will see how each is a response to extreme oppression and a way to speak freely with bravado, and an opportunity, in stories, at least, to triumph over those in authority as was never possible in the days of slavery nor in the days of Jim Crow. We will examine how these stories are reflected and celebrated in *Their Eyes Were Watching God*. Additionally, we will look at music originating with African Americans known as the Blues. We will see how the structure of a blues song is mirrored in the novel. We will examine similarities between examples of blues songs and the novel in terms of literary elements such as personification, hyperbole, simile, metaphor and symbolism as well as their various themes. We will also look at some examples of art of the Harlem Renaissance as a way to assist students in an understanding of the cultural and historical context of the novel.

Notes

(1) Locke, Alain. *The New Negro.* Patton and Honey. p.5.

(2) No author given. *Biographical Essay.* 2005. Thomson Gale, a part of The Thomson Corporation.
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(3) DuBois, W.E.B. *Criteria of Negro Art.* Patton and Honey. p. 49.

(4) No author given. *Biographical Essay.* 2005. Thomson Gale, a part of The Thomson Corporation.
http://www.galegroup.com/free_resources/bhm/hurston_z.htm

(5) Hurston, Zora Neale. *Folklore and Music.* Civilization. Jan/Feb95, Vol. 2 Issue 1. p.50.

(6) No author given. *Biographical Essay.* 2005. Thomson Gale, a part of The Thomson Corporation.
http://www.galegroup.com/free_resources/bhm/hurston_z.htm

(7) Locke, Alain. *The New Negro.* Patton and Honey. p.5.

(8) Ibid., p. 6.

(9) American Passages: A Literary Survey *Unit 8. Regional Realism*. Teacher's Guide. Annenberg Media Learner.org.
http://www.learner.org/amerpass/unit08/pdf/unit08ig.pdf

(10) Callahan, John F. *In the African-American Grain: The Pursuit of Voice in Twentieth-Century Black Fiction.* Urbana amd Chicago:Univeristy of Illinois Press. 1988. p. 34.

(11) Ibid., p. 38

(12) The Black History Gallery - Index Page IV . *Charles Chestnutt*.
<http://www.donsmcclureconsultants.com/concept_051.htm>

(13) Callahan, *op cit.*, p. 44.

(14) Schuyler, George S. *The Negro-Art Hokum.* Patton and Honey. p. 37.

(15) Hurston, Zora Neale. *Characteristics of Negro Expression.* Patton and Honey. p.72-73.

(16) Callahan, *op cit.,* p. 25.

(17) _______, p. 26.

(18) Harry's Blues Lyrics and Tabs Online. Hosted by Tripod.
<http://blueslyrics.tripod.com/bluessongs1.htm>

(19) Johnson, Maria V.*"The World In a Jug and the Stopper in [her] Hand": Their Eyes as Blues Performance.* African American Review, 10624783, Fall98, Vol. 32, Issue para. 5.

(20) Ibid., para. 21.

(21) Braithwaite, William Stanley. *The Negro in American Literature.* Patton and oney. p. 14.

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http://www.learner.org/amerpass/index.html

Black History Gallery- Index. Contains a wealth of information on figures in Black History. http://www.donsmcclureconsultants.com/concept_006.htm

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http://www.rockhall.com/programs/plans.asp

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Reading List for Students

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______________. *Characteristics of Negro Expression.* Patton and Honey 61 - 73.

Attachment #1 - Assorted Blues Lyrics from Harry's Blues Lyrics and Tabs Online. Hosted by Tripod. Source of lyrics to blues songs.
http://blueslyrics.tripod.com/bluessongs1.htm

Attachment #2 Definition of the Blues from "Lesson 2: Langston Hughes and the Blues." *Rock and Roll Hall of Fame and Museum*:*For Teachers*.
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Attachment #3 Definition of Signifying from Adams, Cecil. *To African-Americans, what does 'signifying' mean?* The Straight Dope. September 28, 1984. Chicago Reader. http://www.straightdope.com/classics/a2_244c.html

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A Celebration of African American Oral Tradition in *Their Eyes Were Watching God* by Zora Neale Hurston

Sample Lesson Plans

Lesson #1 Becoming Acquainted with Dialect

Purpose: a) to introduce the concept of writing in dialect.
b) to increase the understanding of the difficulties in reading and writing in dialect.

Methods:
1. Ask students to work with a partner for the following activity - Write a paragraph about something going on around the school or another story that you heard in standard English. Now narrate that story to your partner who will attempt to write the same event as you've said it, imitating the actual sounds of speech as closely as they can, focusing on the sounds of the words they hear rather than resorting to standard spellings.

2. Trade passages with your partner. Each partner then will attempt to read the passage. See if they can understand what you wrote. Now read your passage to your partner. Discuss how each of you would represent the words as they sound and what could be understood and what could not.

3. Rewrite an agreed upon version of the passage in dialect on chart paper to posted in the classroom. Ask the class to attempt to read each passage. Discuss the representation of words as they sound and what could be understood and what could not. What were some of the spellings that each of you used to represent what was heard.

4. Select a passage from *The Adventures of Huckleberry Finn* by Mark Twain that is written in dialect. Ask students to read it silently and summarize the meaning. Ask for volunteer to read their answers and compare with other classmates. Now ask for a volunteer to read the passage aloud. Ask students: Did the oral rendition assist you in understanding what was said? Discuss what were the difficulties in understanding the dialect in reading it and then in listening to it.

5. Play an excerpt from ***Their Eyes Were Watching God*** from the Unabridged Caedom Audio recording narrated by Ruby Dee. Ask students to attempt to transcribe what they hear, again ignoring usual conventions of standard English, but instead attempting to write exactly what they are hearing. Next read the

identical passage from the text. Ask students to compare what choices they made in transcription to those made by Hurston.

6. Reassure students that if they are having difficulty reading the dialect portions of the novel that this is to be expected. Suggest that they read difficult portions out loud to themselves to help them decipher those passages at first, until they become accustomed to the unusual spellings and punctuation.

Lesson #2

Purpose:

a) to continue to practice reading in dialect.

b) to become acquainted with both stylistic and historical changes in dialect.

c) to have a greater historical perspective on the use of dialect through our history

d) to see the use of dialect as part of a national literary movement toward greater realism and and American form of writing.

Methods:

1. Assist students with the dialect representation in these stories. Present some examples of spellings that were used, such as the following: “de” for “the,” “gwyne” for “going,” and “sezee” for “he says.”

2. Ask students to read “UNCLE REMUS INITIATES THE LITTLE BOY” by Joel Chandler Harris (Attachment #8) and “The Goophered Grapevine” by Charles Chestnutt (Attachment #9).

3. Stories of this type are known as trickster tales. Ask students to describe what aspects of the stories might cause them to be labeled as such. How are the stories alike? How do they differ?

4. All of the questions in this section(#4) come from the Teacher’s Guide to Unit 8: Regional Realism in the American Passages Series:

Comprehension: Which animals are weak and which are strong in the Uncle Remus stories? How does Brer Rabbit succeed in reversing traditional power relations in his encounters with supposedly stronger animals? What qualities enable Brer Rabbit’s success?

Comprehension: Examine the frame narratives surrounding the animal fables (in a story that describes the conditions of its own telling, the portion that sets up the “story within the story” is called the frame narrative). How is Uncle Remus portrayed? What is his relationship to the boy and the boy’s family? How does Uncle Remus assert control over the stories and authority over the boy on occasion?

Comprehension: Why does Uncle Julius tell the white narrator the story of the "goophered" vineyard? What effect does the story have on the narrator? What do we learn about Julius's relationship to the land and its produce over the course of the tale?

Context: Compare Harris's representation of Uncle Remus and his trickster stories to Charles Chesnutt's Uncle Julius in "The Goophered Grapevine." How are these portraits of African American storytellers different from one another? How do the trickster tales narrated by each of the "Uncles" compare? How do Chesnutt's accounts of Uncle Julius's history and motives complicate our understanding of "The Goophered Grapevine"?

Context: Compare Charles Chestnutt's Uncle Julius to Joel Chandler Harris's Uncle Remus. What kinds of relationships do they have with their white audience? What seems to motivate their storytelling sessions?

Because his Uncle Julius stories contain a frame narrative from the point of view of a rather condescending white man, many of Chesnutt's early readers probably assumed the writer was white. In 1899, when he began to write full time, Chesnutt made his own racial identity more public. Ask students to think about the role of the white narrator in the Uncle Julius stories. Why might Chesnutt have adopted this narrative voice? Why might he have eventually felt compelled to publicize his own racial background as the stories became more popular?

Harris always insisted that he did not invent the Uncle Remus tales but instead simply recorded the legends and stories he collected from African Americans. Although he obviously filtered and edited the tales, he would not publish any story that he could not authenticate as part of traditional black folklore. He even claimed that the central character of Uncle Remus "was not an invention of my own, but a human syndicate, three or four old darkies I had known. I just walloped them together into one person and called him Uncle Remus." After providing students with this background information, ask them to consider the implications of Harris's claims. How does his status as a recorder of folklore change our understanding of him as a writer? Should we read the Remus tales as faithful transcriptions of the stories as their black authors orally constructed them? To what extent might Harris have changed the stories in the act of recording them? Should we understand Uncle Remus as an "authentic" portrait of the African Americans Harris knew? Why might Harris have been invested in claiming this kind of accuracy and authenticity for his work?

You might ask students to rewrite the frame narrative of Chesnutt's work so that it is clearly not a white narrator. What would need to be changed? What would get left as is? How does this change the nature of the story?

Exploration: Stories about Brer Rabbit and his fellow animals have continued to entertain American readers—adults and children alike—through the twentieth century. Books featuring Uncle Remus have continued to sell well, and in 1946 Disney produced Song of the South, an animated feature film about the characters that populate the Uncle Remus stories (despite criticisms of the film's racial insensitivity, Disney re-released Song of the South as recently as 1986). Why do you think these stories and images have remained so popular? How might their significance to white and black audiences have changed over time?

Compare a page of Harris's dialect to a page of Mark Twain's. When Twain writes in dialect, portraying the speech of Jim, what are the differences in strategy? Which works better for a modern reader? After students have become more comfortable reading Harris's and Twain's representation of African American speech, ask them to think about why these renditions of southern black dialect might have been so popular with white northern audiences in the late nineteenth century.

5. Ask students to form groups of three to four. The task of each group is to compare a portion of these stories to the passages previously read from *The Adventures of Huckleberry Finn* by Mark Twain and ***Their Eyes Were Watching God*** by Zora Neale Hurston with a focus on the specific choices made in spelling particular words. Compare spellings for commonly used words as similar to the ones I have already placed in the chart. Prepare a chart to be displayed to the class of ten to twelve words.

Lesson #3

Purpose:

a) to establish a purpose for reading

b) to increase an understanding of the literary elements in the novel

c) to compile a list of excerpts to be later used in comparison to the Blues as well as a resource for citing examples from the text for future essays.

Methods:

1. Ask students to read the novel ***Their Eyes Were Watching God*** with a focus on finding examples of personification, symbols, hyperbole, direct address, changes in point of view from first person to third person and back again, and others. Students are to notate their novels by placing post-its when they encounter their examples.

2. From time to time while reading the novel, we will post examples on chart paper around the classroom for discussion and referral.

Lesson #4 Signifying

Purpose:
1. Application of an understanding of literary elements contained in the poem, specifically hyperbole, personification, and simile.
2. Examine the meter and rhyme and discuss its purpose.

Method:
1. Ask students to define the terms Signifying and playing the dozens to check background knowledge. Read attachment #3 - The definition of signifying and playing the dozens in traditional African American Culture.

2. Place students into groups of four or five. Ask students for examples of signifying that they have heard or even said themselves. For example, what insults against "yo' mama" have they heard? Ask each group to place these on chart paper to display and read to the class.

3. Give students their own copies of the "Signifying Monkey."
Questions for discussion on the "Signifying Monkey."
Factual questions:
- a) What lie does the Monkey tell the Lion?
- b) What happens to the Lion as a result?
- c) What was the Lion's first response to the Monkey when they met again?
- d) What insults did the Monkey reign down on the Lion in any case?
- e) What accident occurs that puts the Monkey in mortal danger?
- f) How did the Monkey himself cause this to happen?
- g) How does the Monkey escape?

Evaluation questions:
- a) What specific examples of signifying do you find in the poem? Highlight or underline those passages on your handout.
- b) What adjectives would you use to describe the Monkey's personality? the Lion's personality?
- c) How does the Monkey's hubris almost cost him his life?
- d) Who might the Monkey and the Lion represent, especially if the story originated in an era of slavery?
- e) What might have been the emotional satisfaction of telling this story among oppressed African Americans?

4. Review the definitions of hyperbole, personification and simile. Find examples of each in the poem.

5. Count the syllables in each line of the poem and notice which syllables are stressed. Is there a regularity to the rhythm? Do a check as well at the rhyming

pattern. Is that more or less regular than the rhythm? What is the purpose of having regular rhythm and rhyme? How does it assist the teller? Given that this poem is from an oral tradition where changes are made on a regular basis, why is this regularity important?

6. Read pages 63 to 69 in *Their Eyes Were Watching God.*   Review rules for punctuating dialogue, reminding students that a new paragraph indicates a new person speaking, this removing the necessity to constantly have to say "he said, she said" after every line. Ask students to read the passage silently, identifying which lines are spoken by which of the following characters. Then assign students to take parts and read these pages orally as if reading a play.
Students would be assigned the following parts:
Narrator - to read all parts not in quotation marks
Lige
Sam
Walter Thomas
Charlie Jones
Daisy
David
Jim
When finished, review the definitions of signifying and playing the dozens. How do these remarks match the definition of signifying? Do we see any connections between the Signifying Monkey and the characters portrayed on these pages of the novel?

7. Ask students to compare the tone of the pages above and the passages to follow. Be sure students notice that the exchange in the pages above were in fun, while the passages to follow are more serious and hurtful in nature.

Reread Jody's comments to Janie on page 78. How do these comments match the definition of signifying? What is the content of the insults he aims at Janie? What effect do these insults have on her? Why are these comments particularly hurtful to her?
Reread Janie's retort on page 79. How do these comments match the definition of signifying? What is the content of the insults she aims at Jody? What effect do these insults have on him? Why are these comments particularly hurtful to him? What does he imagine will be the effects on his reputation amongst to people of the town?

8. How is the relationship between Janie and Jody different as a result of this signifying?

Lesson #5   Other African American Toasts

1. Read Attachment #5 - definition of African American Toasts.

2. Read Attachment #6 - "Stackolee," and answer the following questions:

a) What aspect of African American History is referenced when the poem says in line three, "I thought I heard some old dog bark"?

b) Why does Stackolee kill Billy?

c) What is the overall tone of the poem?

d) What tone in particular does Stackolee take with Sister Lou?

e) Reread pages 139 - 143 and the description of Mrs. Turner. In what ways is Mrs. Turner and her attitude similar to that of Sister Lou in "Stackolee?" What do you think of Mrs. Turner, who "didn't forgive [Janie] for marrying a man as dark as Tea Cake"(140) or who says, "Ah can't stand black niggers. Ah don't blame de white folks from hatin' 'em 'cause Ah can't stand 'em mahself." (141)

f) Reread pages 147 - 153 in Their Eyes Were Watching God when Tea Cake and his friends decide to teach Mrs. Turner and her "altar to the unattainable - Caucasian characteristics"- a lesson. What exactly do they do? How is this event reminiscent of Stackolee and his interaction with Sister Lou?

g) What else about Stakolee reminds you of Tea Cake?

h) How does Stackolee talk to the Devil and put him in his place?

i) Who does the Devil symbolize?

j) What treatment does the devil receive at the hands of Stackolee?

k) What psychological satisfaction would there be for stories like this during times of slavery and other severe oppression?

l) What examples of Signifying do you find in "Stackolee"?

3. Read Attachment #7: "Sinking of the *Titanic*" and answer the following questions:

a) How does Shine show that he knows more than his Captain?

b) How does Shine get his revenge?

c) What is the overall tone of the poem?

d) What psychological satisfaction would there be for stories like this during times of slavery and other severe oppression?

4. Count the syllables in each line of the poems and notice which syllables are stressed. Is there a regularity to the rhythm? Do a check as well at the rhyming pattern. Is that more or less regular than the rhythm? Do the same principles apply to these poems as to "Signifying Monkey?"

Follow-up Assignments:

1. Compare the characteristics of Shine, Stackolee and the Signifying Monkey. What do they all have in common? What are their differences? Write an essay in which you discuss this using quotes from the text to support your position.

2. In what ways does Zora Neale Hurston celebrate African American Toasting and other oral traditions in her novel? Write an essay in which you discuss this using quotes from the text to support your position.
3. Write your own version of a poem starring Shine.

Lesson #6 Art and the Novel

Purpose:

a)Students will see the vitality and liveliness in Hurston's tone by noting the same in a Visual Artifact.

b) Students will become acquainted with the cultural and historical context of *Their Eyes Were Watching God* by examining paintings of the era.

c) Students will learn the process of close reading a work of art.

Methods:

1. Download "Midsummer Night in Harlem" by Palmer Hayden and make copies for your students. It is available on the Annenberg CPB Project web site at <http://www.learner.org/amerpass/slideshow/archive_search.php> and is in the *American Passages* Slideshow, Archive # 2976. Then model a close reading of this piece. Discuss the elements of the work. Note how the subjects are dressed(generally very well) and why they might be outside in such numbers on a midsummer's night (to cool off?). Note the church in the background because it is an important element in the lives of African Americans. Note the joyful tone of the painting, and how it shows a vibrant life and a level of racial pride as we will also see in *Their Eyes Were Watching God.* Discuss the painter and his goals as an artist. Discuss the time period in which the work was painted, and what brought black artists to Harlem from all around the world at this time. Do all of this in front of the students as an example of what you expect them to do with other paintings.

2. Download "Drawing in Two Colors" by Winold Reiss (also called "Interpretation of Harlem Jazz I") and make copies for your students. It is available on the Annenberg CPB Project web site at <http://www.learner.org/amerpass/slideshow/archive_search.php> and is in the *American Passages* Slideshow, Archive # 5479. Ask students to examine the work and to do a close reading in the same manner as you modeled. They may also answer the following questions:

a) How were African Americans depicted Minstrel shows of the 1920's and earlier? (students could be assigned this as a research project.) How does this work seem to comment on those shows?
b) What seems to be the focal point of the work? How does the painting draw our attention to particular points on the canvas?

c) What objects do you see depicted? What do they symbolize? How could the inclusion of some of these items be a cause for controversy in the African American community?
d) How many people do you see and what are they doing? How can you tell?
e) What dances were popular at this time? (students could be assigned this as a research project.) What dance might they be doing?
f) What do you imagine is the intended audience of the piece? Why do you think so?
g) What image of African Americans does this work convey?
h) How does the work communicate movement?
i) How would you characterize the tone and style of this work?

Lesson #7 *Their Eyes* and The Blues

Purpose: Compare the point of view, plot structure, themes, personification, hyperbole, and symbolism in *Their Eyes Were Watching God* and examples of the Blues.

Methods:
1. Examine a definition of the Blues. Read Attachment #1 and #2. Play examples of the songs.

Point of View:
1. Examine who is being addressed in "Downhearted Blues" by Bessie Smith

Plot Structure:
1. Read definition off the blues (Attachment #1)

2. Trace the plot structure in ***Their Eyes***. Make note of the 3 marriages in Janie's life surrounded by her conversation with Janie's best friend, Pheoby, providing unity to the novel.

3. Compare this structure to that of a Blues song. As explained in Norton's Anthology of African American Literature, W.C. Handy, referred to as "the father of the blues," wrote "most often twelve-bar forms: three lines of four beats each, the first line repeated twice and followed by a third end-rhymed line." For example, we see this in his composition entitled, "St. Louis Blues" or in Down Hearted Blues by Bessie Smith (see attachment #2)

4. Trace plot structure of Memphis Minnie's "New Bumble Bee" for three part narrative. Identify the three parts.

5. Read other blues songs lyrics. Find other examples of three part structures.

Themes

1. In small groups, identify common themes you find in the blues songs in attachment #2.

2. Write the themes you identified on chart paper and have a group member share your findings with the whole class.

3. Again in small groups, look for passages from *Their Eyes* that reflect similar themes to those on the chart paper.

Personification

1. Study "Jailhouse Blues" by Bessie Smith for examples of personification. (the blues itself is personified)

2. Examine these passages from *Their Eyes* for examples of personification.

3. find other examples from the lyrics as well as the novel

Hyperbole

1. Define hyperbole

2. Examine the passage by the "mule-talkers" for examples of hyperbole

3. Examine lyrics of the Blues songs for examples of hyperbole.

Symbolism

1. Many of the symbols of both the novel and lyrics of the Blues are of a sexual nature, so consider the maturity of your students before delving into the symbolism contained in each. Some examples of these symbols to examine might include the bee, honey, pollen, blossoms, and the pear tree.

ATTACHMENT #7

Sinking of the *Titanic**

It was 1912 when the awful news got around
That the great *Titanic* was sinking down.
Shine came running up on deck, told the Captain, "Please,
The water in the boiler room is up to my knees."

Captain said, "Take your black self on back down there!"
I got a hundred-fifty pumps to keep the boiler room clear."
Shine went back in the hole, started shoveling coal,
Singing, "Lord, have mercy, Lord, on my soul!"

Just then half the ocean jumped across the boiler room deck.
Shine yelled to the Captain, "The water's 'round my neck!"
Captain said, "Go back! Neither fear not doubt!
I got a hundred more pumps to keep the water out."

"Your words sound happy and your words sound true,
But this is one time, Cap, your words won't do.
I don't like chicken and I don't like ham-
And I don't believe your pumps is worth a damn!"

The old *Titanic* was beginning to sink.
Shine pulled off his clothes and jumped in the brink.
He said, "Little fish, big fish, and shark fishes, too,
Get out of my way because I'm coming through."

Captain on the bridge hollered, "Shine, Shine, save poor me!
And I'm make you as rich as any man can be.
Shine said, "There's more gold on land than there is on sea.
And he swimmed on.

Big fat banker begging, "Shine, Shine, save poor me!
I'll give you a thousand shares of T and T."
Shine said, "More stocks on land than there is on sea."
And he swimmed on.

When all them white folks went to heaven,
Shine was in Sugar Ray's Bar drinking Seagrams Seven.

(1) This sanitized version of the *Titanic* ballad was presented by Langston Hughes and Arna Bontemps in *The Book of American Negro Folklore* (1958).

Attachment #8

UNCLE REMUS INITIATES THE LITTLE BOY

One evening recently, the lady whom Uncle Remus calls "Miss Sally" missed her little seven-year-old. Making search for him through the house and through the yard, she heard the sound of voices in the old man's cabin, and, looking through the window, saw the child sitting by Uncle Remus. His head rested against the old man's arm, and he was gazing with an expression of the most intense interest into the rough, weather-beaten face, that beamed so kindly upon him. This is what "Miss Sally" heard:
"Bimeby, one day, atter Brer Fox bin doin' all dat he could fer ter ketch Brer Rabbit, en Brer Rabbit bein doin' all he could fer ter keep 'im fum it, Brer Fox say to hisse'f dat he'd put up a game on Brer Rabbit, en he ain't mo'n got de wuds out'n his mouf tewl Brer Rabbit came a lopin' up de big road, lookin' des ez plump, en ez fat, en ez sassy ez a Moggin hoss in a barley-patch.

""Hol' on dar, Brer RAbbit,' sez Brer Fox, sezee.
"'I ain't got time, Ber Fox,' sez Brer Rabbit, sezee, sorter mendin' his licks.
"'I wanter have some confab wid you, Brer Rabbit,' sez Brer Fox, sezee.
"'All right, Brer Fox, but you better holler fum whar you stan'. I'm monstus full er fleas dis mawnin',' sez Brer Rabbit, sezee.
"'I seed Brer B'ar yistdiddy, 'sez Brer Fox, sezee, 'en he sorter rake me over de coals kaze you en me ain't make frens en live naberly, en I tole 'im dat I'd see you.'
"Den Brer Rabbit scratch one year wid his off hinefoot sorter jub'usly, en den he ups en sez, sezee:
"'All a settin', Brer Fox. Spose'n you drap roun' ter-morrer en take dinner wid me. We ain't got no great doin's at our house, but I speck de ole 'oman en de chilluns kin sorter scarmble roun' en git up sump'n fer ter stay yo' stummick.'
"'I'm 'gree'ble, Brer Rabbit,' sez Brer Fox, sezee.
"'Den I'll 'pen' on you,' sez Brer Rabbit, sezee.
"Nex' day, Mr. Rabbit an' Miss Rabbit got up soom, 'fo' day, en raided on a gyarden like Miss Sally's out dar, en got some cabbiges, en some roas'n years, en some sparrer-grass, en dey fix up a smashin' dinner. Bimeby one er de little Rabbits, playin' ou t in de back-yard, come runnin' in hollerin', 'Oh, ma! oh, ma! I seed Mr. Fox a comin'!' En den Brer Rabbit he tuck de chilluns by der years en make um set down, en den him and Miss Rabbit sorter dally roun' waitin' for Brer Fox. En dey keep on waitin' for Brer Fox. En dey keep on waitin', but no Brer Fox ain't come. Atter 'while Brer Rabbit goes to de do', easy like, en peep out, en dar, stickin' fum behime de cornder, wuz de tip-een' er Brer Fox tail. Den Brer Rabbit shot de do' en sot down, en put his paws behime his years en begin fer ter sing:
"'De place wharbouts you spill de grease,
Right dar you er boun' ter slide,
An' whar you fin' a bunch er ha'r,
You'll sholy fine de hide.'

*"Nex' day, Brer Fox sont word by Mr. Mink, en skuze hisse'f kaze he wuz too sick fer ter come, en he ax Brer Rabbit fer ter come en take dinner wid him, en Brer Rabbit say he wuz 'gree'ble.
Bimeby, w'en de shadders wuz at der shortes', Brer Rabbit he sorter brush up en sa'nter down ter Brer Fox's house, en w'en he got dar, he haer somebody groanin', en he look in de do' an dar he see Brer Fox settin' up in a rockin'-cheer all wrop up wid flannil, en he look mighty weak. Brer Rabbit look all roun', he did, but he ain't see no dinner. De dish-pan wuz settin' on de table, en close by wuz a kyarvin' knife.
"'Look like you gwintee have chicken fer dinner, Brer Fox,' sez Brer Rabbit, sezee.
"'Yes, Brer Rabbit, deyer nice, en fresh, en tender, 'sez Brer Fox, sezee.
"Den Brer Rabbit sorter pull hiss mustarsh, en say: 'You ain't got no calamus root, is you, Brer Fox? I done got so now dat I can't eat no chicken 'ceppin she's seasoned up wid calamus root.' En wid dat Brer Rabbit lipt out er de do' and dodge 'mong the bushes, en sot dar watchin' for Brer Fox; en he ain't watch long, nudder, kaze Brer Fox flung off de flannil en crope out er de house en got whar he could cloze in on Brer Rabbit, en bimeby Brer Rabbit holler out: 'Oh, Brer Fox! I'll des put yo' calamus root out yer on dish yer stump. Better come git it while hit's fresh,' and wid dat Brer Rabbit gallop off home. En Brer Fox ain't never kotch 'im yit, en w'at's mo', honey, he ain't gwineter."

This tale functions as an important component of the larger text, *Legends of the Old Plantation*, in that it introduces the primary characters and establishes the stylistic form of the text. Immediately, the reader is introduced to Uncle Remus, Miss Sally, and the little boy; through the stories of Uncle Remus, we are introduced to the principal animal characters, Brer Rabbit and Brer Fox. One important aspect of the text's narrative style is the limited view that the reader gets of the characters. When we first are introduced to Uncle Remus, we do not see him as a first person narrator, but rather through the eyes of Miss Sally, whom we see through the eyes of an anonymous limited narrator. This is important to the text because it establishes a pattern of limited insight to the minds of the human charcters, while more detail is given to the thoughts of the animal characters. Harris also introduces the conflict of many of the animal tales, the pursuit of Brer Rabbit and his escape through the use of wit and cunning.

The tale also establishes the pattern in which the stories are told--by an elderly former slave to the young grandson of his former master. It is significant the Harris' storyteller be an elderly former slave. In this way, Uncle Remus provides a direct link to a past and culture that is quickly slipping away. For Harris, an advocate of preserving the Southern liteary heritage in the wake of the encroaching industrial expansion of the New South, the decision to commit the oral slave tradition to written form was a self-conscious attempt to solidf and preserve an endangered remnant of the old plantation culture. Moreover, the recording of these tales by Harris through the stories of Uncle Remus was a step toward the diversifcation of Southern literature. During the Reconstruction era, there was little African-American writing in the national level, and still less on the regional and

local levels. Thus, the stories of Uncle Remus filled a tremendous void in acknowledging the culture of the African-American slaves, as well as the plantation culture Harris wanted to preserve.
http://xroads.virginia.edu/~UG97/remus/contents.html

Attachment #9

Chesnutt, Charles Waddell, 1858-1932. The Goophered Grapevine
Electronic Text Center, University of Virginia Library

ABOUT ten years ago my wife was in poor health, and our family doctor, in whose skill and honesty I had implicit confidence, advised a change of climate. I was engaged in grape-culture in northern Ohio, and decided to look for a locality suitable for carrying on the same business in some Southern State. I wrote to a cousin who had gone into the turpentine business in central North Carolina, and he assured me that no better place could be found in the South than the State and neighborhood in which he lived: climate and soil were all that could be asked for, and land could be bought for a mere song. A cordial invitation to visit him while I looked into the matter was accepted. We found the weather delightful at that season, the end of the summer, and were most hospitably entertained. Our host placed a horse and buggy at our disposal, and himself acted as guide until I got somewhat familiar with the country.

I went several times to look at a place which I thought might suit me. It had been at one time a thriving plantation, but shiftless cultivation had well-night exhausted the soil. There had been a vineyard of some extent on the place, but it had not been attended to since the war, and had fallen into utter neglect. The vines -- here partly supported by decayed and broken-down arbors, there twining themselves among the branches of the slender saplings which had sprung up among them -- grew in wild and unpruned luxuriance, and the few scanty grapes which they bore were the undisputed prey of the first comer. The site was admirably adapted to grape-raising; the soil, with a little attention, could not have been better; and with the native grape, the luscious scuppernong, mainly to rely upon, I felt sure that I could introduce and cultivate successfully a number of other varieties.

One day I went over with my wife, to show her the place. We drove between the decayed gate-posts -- the gate itself had long since disappeared -- and up the straight, sandy lane to the open space where a dwelling-house had once stood. But the house had fallen a victim to the fortunes of war, and nothing remained of it except the brick pillars upon which the sills had rested. We alighted, and walked about the place for a while; but on Annie's complaining of weariness I led the way back to the yard, where a pine log, lying under a spreading elm, formed a shady though somewhat hard seat. One end of the log was already occupied by a venerable-looking colored man. He held on his knees a hat full of grapes, over which he was smacking his lips with great gusto, and a pile of grape-skins near him indicated that the performance was no new thing. He respectfully rose as we approached, and was moving away, when I begged him to keep his seat.

"Don't let us disturb you," I said. "There's plenty of room for us all."

He resumed his seat with somewhat of embarrassment.

"Do you live around here?" I asked, anxious to put him at his ease.

"Yas, suh. I lives des ober yander, behine de nex' san'-hill, on de Lumberton plank-road."

"Do you know anything about the time when this vineyard was cultivated?"

"Lawd bless yer, suh, I knows all about it. Dey ain' na'er a man in dis settlement w'at won' tell yer ole Julius McAdoo 'uz bawn an' raise' on dis yer same plantation. Is you de Norv'n gemman w'at's gwine ter buy de ole vimya'd?"

"I am looking at it," I replied; "but I don't know that I shall care to buy unless I can be reasonably sure of making something out of it."

"Well, suh, you is a stranger ter me, en I is a stranger ter you, en we is bofe strangers ter one anudder, but 'f I 'uz in yo' place, I wouldn' buy dis vimya'd."

"Why not?" I asked.

"Well, I dunner whe'r you b'lieves in cunj'in er not, -- some er de w'ite folks don't, er says dey don't, -- but de truf er de matter is dat dis yer ole vimya'd is goophered."

"Is what?" I asked, not grasping the meaning of this unfamiliar word.

"Is goophered, cunju'd, bewitch'."

He imparted this information with such solemn earnestness, and with such an air of confidential mystery, that I felt somewhat interested, while Annie was evidently much impressed, and drew closer to me.

"How do you know it is bewitched?" I asked.

"I wouldn' spec' fer you ter b'lieve me 'less you know all 'bout de fac's. But ef you en young miss dere doan' min' lis'n'in' ter a ole nigger run on a minute er two w'ile you er restin', I kin 'splain to yer how it all happen'."

We assured him that we would be glad to hear how it all happened, and he began to tell us. At first the current of his memory -- or imagination -- seemed somewhat sluggish; but as his embarrassment wore off, his language flowed more freely, and the story acquired perspective and coherence. As he became more and more absorbed in the narrative, his eyes assumed a dreamy expression, and he seemed to lose sight of his auditors, and to be living over again in monologue his life on the old plantation.

"Ole Mars Dugal' McAdoo bought dis place long many years befo' de wah, en I 'member well w'en he sot out all dis yer part er de plantation in scuppernon's. De vimes growed monst'us fas', en Mars Dugal' made a thousan' gallon er scuppernon' wine eve'y year.

"Now, ef dey's an'thing a nigger lub, nex' ter 'possum, en chick'n, en watermillyums, it's scuppernon's. Dey ain' nuffin dat kin stan' up side'n de scuppernon' fer sweetness; sugar ain't a suckumstance ter scuppernon'. W'en de season is nigh 'bout ober, en de grapes begin ter swivel up des a little wid de wrinkles er ole age, -- w'en de skin git sof' en brown, -- den de scuppernon' make you smack yo' lip en roll yo' eye en wush fer mo'; so I reckon it ain' very 'stonishin' dat niggers lub scuppernon'.

"Dey wuz a sight er niggers in de naberhood er de vimya'd. Dere wuz ole Mars Henry Brayboy's niggers, en ole Mars Dunkin McLean's niggers, en Mars Dugal's own niggers; den dey wuz a settlement er free niggers en po' buckrahs down by de Wim'l'ton Road, en Mars Dugal' had de only vimya'd in de naberhood. I reckon it ain' so much so nowadays, but befo' de wah, in slab'ry times, er nigger didn' mine goin' fi' er ten mile in a night, w'en dey wuz sump'n good ter eat at de yuther een.

"So atter a w'ile Mars Dugal' begin ter miss his scuppernon's. Co'se he 'cuse' de niggers er it, but dey all 'nied it ter de las'. Mars Dugal' sot spring guns en steel traps, en he en de oberseah sot up nights once't er twice't, tel one night Mars Dugal' -- he 'uz a monst'us keerless man -- got his leg shot full er cow-peas. But somehow er nudder dey couldn' nebber ketch none er de niggers. I dunner how it happen, but it happen des like I tell yer, en de grapes kep' on a-goin des de same.

"But bimeby ole Mars Dugal' fix' up a plan ter stop it. Dey 'uz a cunjuh 'ooman livin' down mongs' de free niggers on de Wim'l'ton Road, en all de darkies fum Rockfish ter Beaver Crick wuz feared uv her. She could wuk de mos' powerfulles' kind er goopher, -- could make people hab fits er rheumatiz, er make 'em des dwinel away en die; en dey say she went out ridin' de niggers at night, for she wuz a witch 'sides bein' a cunjuh 'ooman. Mars Dugal' hearn 'bout Aun' Peggy's doin's, en begun ter 'flect whe'r er no he couldn' git her ter he'p him keep de niggers off'n de grapevimes. One day in de spring er de year, ole miss pack' up a basket er chick'n en poun'-cake, en a bottle er scuppernon' wine, en Mars Dugal' tuk it in his buggy en driv ober ter Aun' Peggy's cabin. He tuk de basket in, en had a long talk wid Aun' Peggy. De nex' day Aun' Peggy come up ter de vimya'd. De niggers seed her slippin' 'roun', en dey soon foun' out what she 'uz doin' dere. Mars Dugal' had hi'ed her ter goopher de grapevimes. She sa'ntered 'roun' mongs' de vimes, en tuk a leaf fum dis one, en a grape-hull fum dat one, en a grape-seed fum anudder one; en den a little twig fum here, en a little pinch er dirt fum dere, -- en put it all in a big black bottle, wid a snake's toof en a speckle' hen's gall en some ha'rs fum a black cat's tail, en den fill' de bottle wid scuppernon' wine. W'en she got de goopher all ready en fix', she tuk 'n went out in de woods en buried it under de root uv a red oak tree, en den come back en tole one er de niggers she done goopher de grapevimes, en a'er a nigger w'at eat dem grapes 'ud be sho ter die inside'n twel' mont's.

"Atter dat de niggers let de scuppernon's 'lone, en Mars Dugal' didn' hab no 'casion ter fine no mo' fault; en de season wuz mos' gone, w'en a strange gemman stop at de plantation one night ter see Mars Dugal' on some business; en his coachman, seein' de scuppernon's growin' so nice en sweet, slip 'roun' behine de smoke-house, en et all de scuppernon's he could hole. Nobody didn' notice it at de time, but dat night, on de way home, de gemman's hoss runned away en kill' de coachman. W'en we hearn de noos, Aun' Lucy, de cook, she up 'n say she seed de strange nigger eat'n' er de scuppernon's behine de smoke-house; en den we knowed de goopher had b'en er wukkin. Den one er de nigger chilluns runned away fum de quarters one day, en got in de scuppernon's, en died de nex' week. W'ite folks say he die' er de fevuh, but de niggers knowed it wuz de goopher. So you k'n be sho de darkies didn' hab much ter do wid dem scuppernon' vimes.

"W'en de scuppernon' season 'uz ober fer dat year, Mars Dugal' foun' he had made fifteen hund'ed gallon er wine; en one er de niggers hearn him laffin' wid de oberseah fit ter kill, en sayin' dem fifteen hund'ed gallon er wine wuz monst'us good intrus' on de ten dollars he laid out on de vimya'd. So I 'low ez he paid Aun' Peggy ten dollars fer to goopher de grapevimes.

"De goopher didn' wuk no mo' tel de nex' summer, w'en 'long to'ds de middle er de season one er de fiel' han's died; en ez dat lef' Mars Dugal' sho't er han's, he went off ter town fer ter buy anudder. He fotch de noo nigger home wid 'im. He wuz er ole nigger, er de color er a gingy-cake, en ball ez a hoss-apple on de top er his head. He wuz a peart ole nigger, do', en could do a big day's wuk.

"Now it happen dat one er de niggers on de nex' plantation, one er ole Mars Henry Brayboy's niggers, had runned away de day befo', en tuk ter de swamp, en ole Mars Dugal' en some er de yuther nabor w'ite folks had gone out wid dere guns en dere dogs fer ter he'p 'em hunt fer de nigger; en de han's on our own plantation wuz all so flusterated dat we fuhgot ter tell de noo han' 'bout de goopher on de scuppernon' vimes. Co'se he smell de grapes en see de vimes, an atter dahk de fus' thing he done wuz ter slip off ter de grapevimes 'dout sayin' nuffin ter nobody. Nex' mawnin' he tole some er de niggers 'bout de fine bait er scuppernon' he et de night befo'.

"W'en dey tole 'im 'bout de goopher on de grapevimes, he 'uz dat tarrified dat he turn pale, en look des like he gwine ter die right in his tracks. De oberseah come up en axed w'at 'uz de matter; en w'en dey tole 'im Henry be'n eatin' er de scuppernon's, en got de goopher on 'im, he gin Henry a big drink er w'iskey, en 'low dat de nex' rainy day he take 'im ober ter Aun' Peggy's, en see ef she wouldn' take de goopher off'n him, seein' ez he didn' know nuffin erbout it tel he done et de grapes.

"Sho nuff, it rain de nex' day, en de oberseah went ober ter Aun' Peggy's wid Henry. En Aun' Peggy say dat bein' ez Henry didn' know 'bout de goopher, en et de grapes in ign'ance er de quinseconces, she reckon she mought be able fer ter take de goopher off'n him. So she fotch out er bottle wid some cunjuh medicine in it, en po'd some out in a go'd fer Henry ter drink. He manage ter git it down; he say it tas'e like whiskey wid sump'n bitter in it. She 'lowed dat 'ud keep de goopher off'n him tel de spring; but w'en de sap begin ter rise in de grapevimes he ha' ter come en see her agin, en she tell him w'at e's ter do.

"Nex' spring, w'en de sap commence' ter rise in de scuppernon' vime, Henry tuk a ham one night. Whar'd he git de ham? *I* doan know; dey wa'nt no hams on de plantation 'cep'n' w'at 'uz in de smoke-house, but *I* never see Henry 'bout de smoke-house. But ez I wuz a-sayin', he tuk de ham ober ter Aun' Peggy's; en Aun' Peggy tole 'im dat w'en Mars Dugal' begin ter prume de grapevimes, he mus' go en take 'n scrape off de sap whar it ooze out'n de cut een's er de vimes, en 'n'int his ball head wid it; en ef he do dat once't a year de goopher wouldn' wuk agin 'im long ez he done it. En bein' ez he fotch her de ham, she fix' it so he kin eat all de scuppernon' he want.

"So Henry 'n'int his head wid de sap out'n de big grapevime des ha'f way 'twix' de quarters en de big house, en de goopher nebber wuk agin him dat summer. But de beatenes' thing you eber see happen ter Henry. Up ter dat time he wuz ez ball ez a sweeten' 'tater, but des ez soon ez de young leaves begun ter come out on de grapevimes de ha'r begun ter grow out on Henry's head, en by de middle er de summer he had de bigges' head er ha'r on de plantation. Befo' dat, Henry had tol'able good ha'r 'roun de aidges, but soon ez de young grapes begun ter come

Henry's ha'r begun ter quirl all up in little balls, des like dis yer reg'lar grapy ha'r, en by de time de grapes got ripe his head look des like a bunch er grapes. Combin' it didn' do no good; he wuk at it ha'f de night wid er Jim Crow A small card, resembling a curry-comb in construction, and used by negroes in the rural districts instead of a comb, en think he git it straighten' out, but in de mawnin' de grapes 'ud be dere des de same. So he gin it up, en tried ter keep de grapes down by havin' his ha'r cut sho't.

"But dat wa'nt de quares' thing 'bout de goopher. When Henry come ter de plantation, he wuz gittin' a little ole an stiff in de j'ints. But dat summer he got des ez spry en libely ez any young nigger on de plantation; fac' he got so biggity dat Mars Jackson, de oberseah, ha' ter th'eaten ter whip 'im, ef he didn' stop cuttin' up his didos en behave hisse'f. But de mos' cur'ouses' thing happen' in de fall, when de sap begin ter go down in de grapevimes. Fus', when de grapes 'uz gethered, de knots begun ter straighten out'n Henry's h'ar; en w'en de leaves begin ter fall, Henry's ha'r begin ter drap out; en w'en de vimes 'uz b'ar, Henry's head wuz baller 'n it wuz in de spring, en he begin ter git ole en stiff in de j'ints ag'in, en paid no mo' tention ter de gals dyoin' er de whole winter. En nex' spring, w'en he rub de sap on ag'in, he got young ag'in, en so soopl en libely dat none er de young niggers on de plantation couldn' jump, ner dance, ner hoe ez much cotton ez Henry. But in de fall er de year his grapes begun ter straighten out, en his j'ints ter git stiff, en his ha'r drap off, en de rheumatiz begin ter wrastle wid 'im.

"Now, ef you'd a knowed ole Mars Dugal' McAdoo, you'd a knowed dat it ha' ter be a mighty rainy day when he couldn' fine sump'n fer his niggers ter do, en it ha' ter be a mighty little hole he couldn' crawl thoo, en ha' ter be a monst'us cloudy night w'en a dollar git by him in de dahkness; en w'en he see how Henry git young in de spring en ole in de fall, he 'lowed ter hisse'f ez how he could make mo' money outen Henry dan by wukkin' him in de cotton fiel'. 'Long de nex' spring, atter de sap commence' ter rise, en Henry 'n'int 'is head en commence fer ter git young en soopl, Mars Dugal' up 'n tuk Henry ter town, en sole 'im fer fifteen hunder' dollars. Co'se de man w'at bought Henry didn' know nuffin 'bout de goopher, en Mars Dugal' didn' see no 'casion fer ter tell 'im. Long to'ds de fall, w'en de sap went down, Henry begin ter git ole again same ez yuzhal, en his noo marster begin ter git skeered les'n he gwine ter lose his fifteen-hunder'-dollar nigger. He sent fer a mighty fine doctor, but de med'cine didn' 'pear ter do no good; de goopher had a good holt. Henry tole de doctor 'bout de goopher, but de doctor des laff at 'im.

"One day in de winter Mars Dugal' went ter town, en wuz santerin' 'long de Main Street, when who should he meet but Henry's noo marster. Dey said 'Hoddy,' en Mars Dugal' ax 'im ter hab a seegyar; en atter dey run on awhile 'bout de craps en de weather, Mars Dugal' ax 'im, sorter keerless, like ez ef he des thought of it, --

"'How you like de nigger I sole you las' spring?'

"Henry's marster shuck his head en knock de ashes off'n his seegyar.

"'Spec' I made a bad bahgin when I bought dat nigger. Henry done good wuk all de summer, but sence de fall set in he 'pears ter be sorter pinin' away. Dey ain' nuffin pertickler de matter wid 'im -- leastways de doctor say so -- 'cep'n' a tech er

de rheumatiz; but his ha'r is all fell out, en ef he don't pick up his strenk mighty soon, I spec' I'm gwine ter lose 'im."

"Dey smoked on awhile, en bimeby ole mars say, 'Well, a bahgin's a bahgin, but you en me is good fren's, en I doan wan' ter see you lose all de money you paid fer dat digger [sic]; en ef w'at you say is so, en I ain't 'sputin' it, he ain't wuf much now. I spec's you wukked him too ha'd dis summer, er e'se de swamps down here don't agree wid de san'-hill nigger. So you des lemme know, en ef he gits any wusser I'll be willin' ter gib yer five hund'ed dollars fer 'im, en take my chances on his livin'.'

"Sho nuff, when Henry begun ter draw up wid de rheumatiz en it look like he gwine ter die fer sho, his noo marster sen' fer Mars Dugal', en Mars Dugal' gin him what he promus, en brung Henry home ag'in. He tuk good keer uv 'im dyoin' er de winter, -- give 'im w'iskey ter rub his rheumatiz, en terbacker ter smoke, en all he want ter eat, -- 'caze a nigger w'at he could make a thousan' dollars a year off'n didn' grow on eve'y huckleberry bush.

"Nex' spring, w'en de sap ris en Henry's ha'r commence' ter sprout, Mars Dugal' sole 'im ag'in, down in Robeson County dis time; en he kep' dat sellin' business up fer five year er mo'. Henry nebber say nuffin 'bout de goopher ter his noo marsters, 'caze he know he gwine ter be tuk good keer uv de nex' winter, w'en Mars Dugal' buy him back. En Mars Dugal' made 'nuff money off'n Henry ter buy anudder plantation ober on Beaver Crick.

"But long 'bout de een' er dat five year dey come a stranger ter stop at de plantation. De fus' day he 'uz dere he went out wid Mars Dugal' en spent all de mawnin' lookin' ober de vimya'd, en atter dinner dey spent all de evenin' playin' kya'ds. De niggers soon 'skiver' dat he wuz a Yankee, en dat he come down ter Norf C'lina fer ter learn de w'ite folks how to raise grapes en make wine. He promus Mars Dugal' he cud make de grapevimes b'ar twice't ez many grapes, en dat de noo wine-press he wuz a-sellin' would make mo' d'n twice't ez many gallons er wine. En ole Mars Dugal' des drunk it all in, des 'peared ter be bewitched wit dat Yankee. W'en de darkies see dat Yankee runnin' 'roun de vimya'd en diggin' under de grapevimes, dey shuk dere heads, en 'lowed dat dey feared Mars Dugal' losin' his min'. Mars Dugal' had all de dirt dug away fum under de roots er all de scuppernon' vimes, an' let 'em stan' dat away fer a week er mo'. Den dat Yankee made de niggers fix up a mixtry er lime en ashes en manyo, en po' it roun' de roots er de grapevimes. Den he 'vise' Mars Dugal' fer ter trim de vimes close't, en Mars Dugal' tuck 'n done eve'ything de Yankee tole him ter do. Dyoin' all er dis time, mind yer, 'e wuz libbin' off'n de fat er de lan', at de big house, en playin' kyards wid Mars Dugal' eve'y night; en dey say Mars Dugal' los' mo'n a thousan' dollars dyoin' er de week dat Yankee wuz a runnin' de grapevimes.

"W'en de sap ris nex' spring, ole Henry 'n'inted his head ez yuzhal, en his ha'r commence' ter grow des de same ez it done eve'y year. De scuppernon' vimes growed monst's fas', en de leaves wuz greener en thicker dan dey eber be'n dyowin my rememb'ance; en Henry's ha'r growed out thicker dan eber, en he 'peared ter git younger 'n younger, en soopler 'n soopler; en seein' ez he wuz sho't er han's dat spring, havin' tuk in consid'able noo groun', Mars Dugal' 'cluded he wouldn' sell Henry 'tel he git de crap in en de cotton chop'. So he kep' Henry on de plantation.

"But 'long 'bout time fer de grapes ter come on de scuppernon' vimes, dey 'peared ter come a change ober dem; de leaves wivered en swivel' up, en de young grapes turn' yaller, en bimeby eve'ybody on de plantation could see dat de whole vimya'd wuz dyin'. Mars Dugal' tuck 'n water de vimes en done all he could, but 't wan' no use: dat Yankee done bus' de watermillyum. One time de vimes picked up a bit, en Mars Dugal' thought dey wuz gwine ter come out ag'in; but dat Yankee done dug too close unde' de roots, en prune de branches too close ter de vime, en all dat lime en ashes done burn' de life outen de vimes, en dey des kep' a with'in' en a swivelin'.

"All dis time de goopher wuz a-wukkin'. W'en de vimes commence' ter wither, Henry commence' ter complain er his rheumatiz, en when de leaves begin ter dry up his ha'r commence' ter drap out. When de vimes fresh up a bit Henry 'ud git peart agin, en when de vimes wither agin Henry 'ud git ole agin, en des kep' gittin' mo' en mo' fitten fer nuffin; he des pined away, en fine'ly tuk ter his cabin; en when de big vime whar he got de sap ter 'n'int his head withered en turned yaller en died, Henry died too, -- des went out sorter like a cannel. Dey didn't 'pear ter be nuffin de matter wid 'im, 'cep'n de rheumatiz, but his strenk des dwinel' away 'tel he didn' hab ernuff lef' ter draw his bref. De goopher had got de under holt, en th'owed Henry fer good en all dat time.

"Mars Dugal' tuk on might'ly 'bout losin' his vimes en his nigger in de same year; en he swo' dat ef he could git hold er dat Yankee he'd wear 'im ter a frazzle, en den chaw up de frazzle; en he'd done it, too, for Mars Dugal' 'uz a monst'us brash man w'en he once git started. He sot de vimya'd out ober agin, but it wuz th'ee er fo' year befo' de vimes got ter b'arin' any scuppernon's.

"W'en de wah broke out, Mars Dugal' raise' a comp'ny, en went off ter fight de Yankees. He saw he wuz mighty glad dat wah come, en he des want ter kill a Yankee fer eve'y dollar he los' 'long er dat grape-raisin' Yankee. En I 'spec' he would a done it, too, ef de Yankees hadn' s'picioned sump'n, en killed him fus'. Atter de s'render ole miss move' ter town, de niggers all scattered 'way fum de plantation, en de vimya'd ain' be'n cultervated sence."

"Is that story true?" asked Annie, doubtfully, but seriously, as the old man concluded his narrative.

"It's des ez true ez I'm a-settin' here, miss. Dey's a easy way ter prove it: I kin lead de way right ter Henry's grave ober yander in de plantation buryin'-groun'. En I tell yer w'at, marster, I wouldn' 'vise yer to buy dis yer ole vimya'd, 'caze de goopher's on it yit, en dey ain' no tellin' w'en it's gwine ter crap out."

"But I thought you said all the old vines died."

"Dey did 'pear ter die, but a few ov 'em come out ag'in, en is mixed in mongs' de yuthers. I ain' skeered ter eat de grapes, 'caze I knows de old vimes fum de noo ones; but wid strangers dey ain' no tellin' w'at might happen. I wouldn' 'vise yer ter buy dis vimya'd."

I bought the vineyard, nevertheless, and it has been for a long time in a thriving condition, and is referred to by the local press as a striking illustration of the opportunities open to Northern capital in the development of Southern industries. The luscious scuppernong holds first rank among our grapes, though we cultivate a great many other varieties, and our income from grapes packed and shipped to the

Northern markets is quite considerable. I have not noticed any developments of the goopher in the vineyard, although I have a mild suspicion that our colored assistants do not suffer from want of grapes during the season.

I found, when I bought the vineyard, that Uncle Julius had occupied a cabin on the place for many years, and derived a respectable revenue from the neglected grapevines. This, doubtless, accounted for his advice to me not to buy the vineyard, though whether it inspired the goopher story I am unable to state. I believe, however, that the wages I pay him for his services are more than an equivalent for anything he lost by the sale of the vineyard.

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