

“Sweat” by Zora Neale Hurston – Suggested Lesson Procedure

1. Have students complete the anticipation activity before reading or knowing anything about the story “Sweat” by Zora Neale Hurston.
2. Review the historical context and author background with students using the Powerpoint presentation.
3. Review academic vocabulary terms with students using the Powerpoint presentation. Students should copy the definitions into their graphic organizers.
4. Read the short story “Sweat” with the whole class. If you’ve never read the story before, you should look over the text beforehand because the dialect is challenging at first glance.

I highly recommend accompanying the text with audio to help students understand the dialect. I’ve linked two options of audio versions below—both with their pros and cons listed.

[OPTION 1 AUDIO](#) = This audio is 27 minutes in length. The speaker does a great job, but she admittedly was sick with the flu while recording, so you can hear her cough here and there. This audio is an easy option because it is only one video. Another note to consider is that this particular speaker chose *not* to use the N-word, but rather she replaces the term with “man.” Depending on your teaching style, you may prefer this option.

[OPTION 2 AUDIO](#) = This speaker divided her recordings into 4 parts. The creator of this video does an incredible job reading; overall, it is a more authentic and effective read (in my opinion). As opposed to option 1, this speaker *does* use the N-word as it was intended by the original author.

[Part 1](#) = 8.5 minutes
[Part 2](#) = 6.5 minutes
[Part 3](#) = 7.5 minutes
[Part 4](#) = 10 minutes

Total = 32.5 minutes

5. Have students work in pairs to complete the literary analysis questions. Review the correct answers with students once everyone is done.

6. Assign students groups to complete the discussion questions or complete the discussion questions as a whole class.

7. Assign students the theme analysis chart and biblical allusions chart. This can be an independent activity or students can work together.

8. Assign students the after reading journal prompt to be completed individually.

Name:

Date:

Anticipation Activity

Part A Directions: Write down the first word that comes to your mind as you read each word below.

Example: Field

PREVIEW

Baseball

NOT FOR EDUCATIONAL USE

1. Horse

2. Box

3. Laundry

4. Snake

PREVIEW

5. Skillet

NOT FOR EDUCATIONAL USE

6. Tub

7. Sweat

8. Marriage

9. Sunday

PREVIEW

10. Flowerbed

NOT FOR EDUCATIONAL USE

Part B Directions: Write a prediction about what you think this story will be about.

PREVIEW

NOT FOR EDUCATIONAL USE

Name:

Date:

“Sweat” by Zora Neale Hurston
Vocabulary

Vocabulary Word	Part of Speech	Definition
mirth		PREVIEW
truculently		NOT FOR EDUCATIONAL USE
commence		
scornfully		
helter-skelter		PREVIEW
meekness		NOT FOR EDUCATIONAL USE
listlessly		
nullify		
asterperious		PREVIEW
broach		NOT FOR EDUCATIONAL USE
quarrel		
inhibitions		
gibbering		PREVIEW
coherent		
woe		NOT FOR EDUCATIONAL USE

Name:

Date:

**“Sweat” by Zora Neale Hurston
Literary Analysis**

1. Why are Sykes and Delia arguing on this particular Sunday night?

PREVIEW

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2. Explain the meaning of the following simile. “Delia’s habitual meekness seemed to slip from her shoulders like a blown scarf.”

PREVIEW

NOT FOR EDUCATIONAL USE

3. What does the pile of laundry symbolize?

PREVIEW

4. What does Delia think about when she lays awake in bed?

NOT FOR EDUCATIONAL USE

5. Explain the following quote. “Anything like flowers had long ago been drowned in the salty stream that had been pressed from her heart.”

PREVIEW

NOT FOR EDUCATIONAL USE

6. What is the “triumphant indifference” Delia takes part in? Why is it an achievement?

PREVIEW

NOT FOR EDUCATIONAL USE

7. Who is Bertha? What do readers know about her? Why does Hurston choose to keep her character in the background?

PREVIEW

NOT FOR EDUCATIONAL USE

8. How is Sykes viewed by his peers?

PREVIEW

NOT FOR EDUCATIONAL USE

9. When Clarke speaks for the first time, what does he discuss? What metaphor does he use?

PREVIEW

NOT FOR EDUCATIONAL USE

10. Why does Hurston include the dialogue between the men on the porch? Why is it important?

11. What is the meaning of the following quote? “She [Delia] avoided the villagers and meeting places in her efforts to be blind and deaf.”

12. What are “dog days”? How does the setting impact the story?

PREVIEW

NOT FOR EDUCATIONAL USE

13. What surprise does Sykes bring home for Delia?

PREVIEW

NOT FOR EDUCATIONAL USE

14. What is the significance of the bullwhip mentioned in the beginning of the story?

PREVIEW

NOT FOR EDUCATIONAL USE

15. How does Delia's faith help her through the hardships in her life?

PREVIEW

NOT FOR EDUCATIONAL USE

16. Why is this story titled “Sweat”?

Name:

Date:

**“Sweat” by Zora Neale Hurston
Discussion Questions**

1. Why do you think Delia and Sykes stay married despite their distaste for one another?

PREVIEW

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2. Is Delia a good spouse? Why or why not?

PREVIEW

NOT FOR EDUCATIONAL USE

3. What does a good/healthy marriage require? What are Sykes and Delia missing?

PREVIEW

4. How might this story be different if Sykes and Delia had children?

NOT FOR EDUCATIONAL USE

PREVIEW

5. How are men and women portrayed differently in this story?

NOT FOR EDUCATIONAL USE

6. What drives Delia's inaction at the end of the story as she hears Sykes suffering? Shock? Fear? Revenge?

PREVIEW

NOT FOR EDUCATIONAL USE

7. What is your opinion on the dialect found in "Sweat"? What effect does it have on the story?

PREVIEW

NOT FOR EDUCATIONAL USE

8. Does Sykes get what he deserves? How is it ironic?

PREVIEW

NOT FOR EDUCATIONAL USE

9. How is the imagery in the final lines different from other scenes in the story?

PREVIEW

NOT FOR EDUCATIONAL USE

10. Why did Hurston choose the snake to be the downfall of Sykes?

Name:

Date:

“Sweat” by Zora Neale Hurston

The author's overall message in a story is called the theme. Fill out the following chart with examples from the text that outline what message Hurston is sending about each of the given themes.

Marriage Theme:	Masculinity and Gender Theme: PREVIEW
Textual Evidence:	Textual Evidence:
Religion Theme:	Race & Society Theme: PREVIEW
Textual Evidence:	Textual Evidence:

NOT FOR EDUCATIONAL USE

Constructed Response

Consider the themes in “Sweat”. How do two or more of these themes build on another to produce a complex story? Use textual evidence and write your answer in at least one fully developed paragraph.

PREVIEW

NOT FOR EDUCATIONAL USE

Name:

Date:

**“Sweat” by Zora Neale Hurston
Biblical Allusions**

Directions: research the allusions from the story and explain the connection/significance to the plot.

Biblical Allusion	Meaning	Connection to the Text Explained
The River Jordan		
Gethsemane		
The rocks of Calvary		
“My cup runneth over”		
Love feast		
Satan		

White clothing

PREVIEW

Snakes

NOT FOR EDUCATIONAL USE

Eve (Delia as a symbol for Eve)

PREVIEW

Delilah (from the Bible)

NOT FOR EDUCATIONAL USE

How does Hurston use biblical allusions to emphasize and highlight the differences in morality between characters in the text?

PREVIEW

NOT FOR EDUCATIONAL USE

PREVIEW

NOT FOR EDUCATIONAL USE

Name:

Date:

**“Sweat” by Zora Neale Hurston
Journal Prompt**

Delia clings to her faith in God to survive her abusive husband; she finds strength and tolerance within her religion. What is something or someone that drives you to stay positive? Who/what is your support system? How do you deal with the hardships and adversities in life? Where do you find strength?

PREVIEW

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mirth	noun	a state of amusement or enjoyment through laughter
truculently	adverb	in an aggressive way, that is belligerent, cruel, or harsh
commence	verb	to begin
scornfully	adverb	in a way that shows attitude or disrespect
helter-skelter	adverb	in disorderly haste and a reckless manner
meekness	noun	the condition of being submissive and timid
listlessly	adverb	characterized by lack of interest or energy
nullify	verb	to cancel out
asterperious	slang/adjective	arrogantly superior and disdainful
broach	verb	to bring up a sensitive or difficult subject for discussion
quarrel	verb	to have a heated argument
inhibitions	noun	feelings that makes one self-conscious to act in a relaxed and natural way
gibbering	adjective	describes speaking rapidly typically through fear or shock
coherent	adjective	describes logical and orderly
woe	noun	great sorrow or distress

PREVIEW

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Answer Key

"Sweat" by Zora Neale Hurston Literary Analysis

1. Why are Sykes and Delia arguing on this particular Sunday night?

Sykes gets angry with Delia because she is sorting clothes—part of her job as a washwoman—that belong to her white clients and he does not want white people's clothing in his home. Delia needs to start on Sunday nights in order to get all of her work done for the week, which makes him angry because Sunday is the day of rest. It seems like he resents her for being a working woman and because he is not the breadwinner. Sykes kicks the pile of clothes, so that Delia needs to start over. She defends herself by explaining that she is the only one who works and supports the family. For 15 years, she has worked and paid for their home, and she is not going to allow him to mess it all up now. After she threatens him, he leaves the house.

2. Explain the meaning of the following simile. "Delia's habitual meekness seemed to slip from her shoulders like a blown scarf."

Delia has finally had enough of Sykes's abuse. She grabs an iron skillet from the kitchen to show that she will hit Sykes if he comes near her. This is different from her usual meekness or submissiveness. The quote, "... Her meekness seemed to slip from her shoulders like a blown scarf" means that her tendency to hold back and usual reluctance to stand up for herself escaped her in an easy, very natural manner.

3. What does the pile of laundry symbolize?

The clothes symbolize Delia's hard work. She takes her job very seriously and so she collects dirty clothes on Saturdays to get a head start cleaning on Sunday before Monday morning comes. The pile of clothes represents Delia's effort to obtain order and structure in her life, and Sykes is the reason that that structure always comes undone.

4. What does Delia think about when she lays awake in bed?

Delia recalls the sad history of her marriage with Sykes. She thinks about how he beat her after 2 months of being married. She remembers how he took trips to Orlando and spent all his money. She thinks about how it is too late to find love with someone else, but she finds love and pride in the home she built and made her own.

5. Explain the following quote. "Anything like flowers had long ago been drowned in the salty stream that had been pressed from her heart."

The Jones's marriage is a "trail" that is tangibly "cluttered" with "debris." Their relationship may have once had love in it, but now all of that is gone. Fond remembrances like "flowers" have been "drowned" in the "salty stream... pressed from her heart," resulting in "her tears, her sweat, her blood." Delia is thinking about her life and realizes that any love she had for Sykes is dead and gone.

6. What is the "triumphant indifference" Delia takes part in? Why is it an achievement?

For many years, Delia has suffered abuse from her husband. For once, his threat to beat her does not affect her at all mentally. She does not feel scared, sad, or angry. She goes to bed with nothing to say to him. This is a win for Delia because it sets in motion her rebellion and realization that she doesn't need or care about Sykes anymore. She is free—in her mind—from his verbal abuse.

7. Who is Bertha? What do readers know about her? Why does Hurston choose to keep her character in the background?

Bertha is Sykes's mistress. Readers know that she is a large woman who does not care that her and Sykes are flaunting their relationship indecently and ostentatiously around town despite him being a married man. Hurston keeps Bertha a background character to emphasize that she is a "secret." Hurston is highlighting the fact that she is a mistress who is supposed to be unseen. The point of view of the story is third person, but by keeping the details of Sykes and Bertha's relationship from the readers, we are more likely to sympathize and

empathize with Delia. Readers can't relate to Bertha if we don't know anything about her as a person. Delia is the hero of the story, so Hurston is pushing readers to relate to her more and this allows Bertha to be perceived as a villain.

8. How is Sykes viewed by his peers?

The other men dislike Sykes and believe he is a disrespectful, ungrateful husband. He is an adulterer who is viewed as a fool; he was lucky to marry a woman like Delia, but he doesn't see it. They realize he treats her terribly.

9. When Clarke speaks for the first time, what does he discuss? What metaphor does he use?

Joe Clarke uses a metaphor to describe how some guys treat their women worse than a piece of sugar cane—they objectify them, use them, and spit them out when they're done. He feels that this is what Sykes is doing to Delia. Clarke also believes that if you're not a good man at heart, you just don't have the ability to be a good man. No law will ever change that.

10. Why does Hurston include the dialogue between the men on the porch? Why is it important?

Delia was a beautiful woman, but working so hard for many years aged her and made her less attractive. She works herself so hard while Sykes treats her badly. He is a cruel husband and even the other men disapprove of his treatment of Delia. This shows readers why Delia has resentment toward her husband. It also tells a lot about society at the time. Their conversation lets readers get a glimpse of the rural south in the 1920s: women are oppressed in a male dominated village; the men are all unemployed which suggests they can't find jobs because of discrimination or because of the labor shortage.

11. What is the meaning of the following quote? "She [Delia] avoided the villagers and meeting places in her efforts to be blind and deaf."

Delia knew her husband was having an affair with Bertha, so in no effort to stop their relationship, she simply stayed away. She didn't want to see it and didn't want to hear about it. It was probably humiliating for her. Perhaps, she didn't want to make a scene of it either. If Sykes was busy with Bertha, at least she didn't have to deal with him; plus, if she embarrassed Sykes publicly, he would probably beat her.

12. What are "dog days"? How does the setting impact the story?

Dog days represent the hottest days of the year. It is a period of inactivity or sluggishness. The setting is Florida in the summertime. The extreme heat is referenced repeatedly as sapping the energy of the townspeople, "the men do not even fling the cane-chews as they normally do, allowing them to spill over lazily." None of the men get involved in the Jones's personal problems although they all like to gossip about it. When people are hot, they are more agitated and oppressed. This contributes to how the Jones's fights are more intense.

13. What surprise does Sykes bring home for Delia?

Sykes brings home a rattlesnake in a box and tells Delia to look inside. Snakes are her biggest fear.

14. What is the significance of the bullwhip mentioned in the beginning of the story?

The scene in "Sweat" where Sykes throws a bullwhip at Delia foreshadows how Sykes is bit by a snake later on in the story. Delia first mistook the bullwhip for a snake. In the end, a snake, the instrument of his own cruelty kills him. Hurston is also using the bullwhip as a symbol of slavery. African Americans have to internalize the traumatic experiences of slavery and deal with the consequent enslaved mindset. The fact that Sykes throws a whip at Delia is an additional layer of malice because of the suggested associations the whip comes with for Black people.

15. How does Delia's faith help her through the hardships in her life?

The first night in the story when Sykes leaves to go see his mistress, Delia says to herself "Oh well, whatever goes over the Devil's back, is got to come under his belly. Sometime or ruther, Sykes, like everybody else, is gointer reap his sowing." This shows how Delia believes that God or the Devil will punish Sykes for his wrongdoing. Going to church and being a good Christian woman is very important to Delia. Her identity is based on being a faithful, hardworking, woman. She focuses all of her energy on church and work which allows her to be distracted from the adversities she faces. Her faith allows Delia to believe everything will work out as God wants it to and that she will not be harmed because she is a good Christian.

16. Why is this story titled "Sweat"?

"Work and sweat, cry and sweat, pray and sweat!" There are lots of examples of imagery of sweat within the story. Delia physically works extremely hard, even on the weekends to provide for herself or for her family. She also puts in the work when it comes to her marriage. Delia tells Sykes that her "sweat is done paid for this house and Ah reckon Ah kin keep on sweatin' in it." The story is also set in the hottest months of Florida summertime. Extreme heat is an important element in the story because it represents the strain and oppression Delia is facing in her marriage. Once Sykes is gone, she no longer feels like she is sweating.

PREVIEW

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PREVIEW

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PREVIEW

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Answer Key

All answers will vary in this section.

“Sweat” by Zora Neale Hurston

Discussion Questions:

1. Why do you think Delia and Sykes stay married despite their distaste for one another?

Sykes probably stays with Delia because she pays for everything and takes care of him, fulfilling all of the domestic duties. Delia probably stays with Sykes for a few reasons. During this time, unmarried or divorced women are looked down upon as lower class citizens. Plus, Delia has a strong dedication to Christianity. It is unlikely she wants to get a divorce because marriage is a life long promise to God and thus a sin to break. During this time period, African American women faced racism and sexism, so it was difficult for Black women to escape these harmful situations.

2. Is Delia a good spouse? Why or why not?

Answers will vary. Some students will say yes because she stays faithful to her husband despite his infidelities. She works hard to make sure her and Sykes have a good home and comfortable life.

3. What does a good/healthy marriage require? What are Sykes and Delia missing?

Answers will vary. A healthy marriage needs communication, trust, loyalty, compromise, and friendship. Sykes and Delia are missing all of these qualities.

4. How might this story be different if the Jones's had children?

Answers will vary. Perhaps Sykes would not be so open with his romantic affairs (or have any at all). Maybe Sykes wouldn't beat Delia. Maybe Sykes would never bring a poisonous snake into the house where his children live.

5. How are men and women portrayed differently in this story?

Sykes is portrayed as a bully. Readers are first introduced to him as “gone missing” with the horse; then, he cruelly teases Delia with the bullwhip. In this story, men are the ones in control whereas women are submissive. Delia treats religion seriously, while her husband makes a hypocrisy of it. Not all men are disrespectful in the story, Joe Clarke being the exception. But despite his wise insight, when Sykes appears, Clarke says nothing. Society seems to be run by males and even if they don't agree with one another, they leave each other be. Delia is Sykes's wife and her property in a sense. Delia has a great work ethic while the men in town are mostly unemployed. Sykes judges Delia for having a job, when most likely he is probably feeling emasculated by her.

6. What drives Delia's inaction at the end of the story as she hears Sykes suffering? Shock? Fear? Revenge?

Delia's decision to not help Sykes could be viewed as revenge because of all the abuse he has caused her and it's also possible that her paralyzing fear of snakes prohibited her from getting any closer to Sykes.

7. What is your opinion on the dialect found in “Sweat”? What effect does it have on the story?

Zora Neale Hurston's use of regional dialect makes the story more interesting and authentic to read. It gives readers a better sense and feel of the setting.

8. Does Sykes get what he deserves? How is it ironic?

Sykes brought the devil into his house and then he was devoured by it. All Delia had to do was wait for justice, just like she said would happen. It is an example of irony because readers wouldn't expect Sykes to get bit by the snake he brought in the house to scare Delia, and Sykes said that he knew how to “handle the snake.”

9. How is the imagery in the final lines different from other scenes in the story?

The entirety of "Sweat" focuses on heat. The ending line states that a "cold river was creeping up and up." Delia is resting under a shady tree because finally she is not "sweating" anymore. The coldness represents how she is finally free from her abusive husband as well as his cold body from death.

10. Why did Hurston choose the snake to be the downfall of Sykes?

The snake historically has been used as a symbol of evil and the devil, and in this story it is the devil that kills Sykes for his sins.

PREVIEW
NOT FOR EDUCATIONAL USE

“Sweat” by Zora Neale Hurston

The author's overall message in a story is called the theme. Fill out the following chart with examples from the text that outline what message Hurston is sending about each of the given themes.

Marriage Theme: Love will be destroyed by any kind of abuse in a relationship. Men and women were not considered equal during this time period. Sykes had the upper hand on Delia which is why he cheated on her and abused her. She loved him when she first married him, but it wasn't long after that that their relationship changed. Despite Delia always acting out of love, Sykes destroyed their marriage with his behaviors. Textual Evidence: “Ah hates you, Sykes,” she said calmly. “Ah hates you tuh de same degree dat Ah useter love yuh.” “She had brought love to the union and he had brought a longing after the flesh. Two months after the wedding, he had given her the first brutal beating.”	Masculinity and Gender Theme: Insecure men use violence and power to seem manlier. The men in the story are shown cheating, abusing, gossiping and spitting sugar cane. This is opposed to Delia, who runs her own household, works full time, feeds and clothes her husband, and deals with his daily verbal, mental, and physical abuse. Sykes is presented as an emasculated man because he does not appear to be consistently employed, and he forcefully represses Delia's confidence and rejects the economic stability that she gains from doing laundry for a living. Textual Evidence: “Then she saw that it was the big bull whip her husband liked to carry when he drove.” “Ah oughter mash you in yo' mouf fuh drawing dat skillet on me.”
Religion Theme: To reach salvation, one has to first go through a period of suffering. Without faith in God, Delia would not have survived her marriage to Sykes. Faith eases her pain knowing God is on her side. If Delia didn't have church and God, she may have given up a long time ago. After suffering and keeping her family together, eventually she is liberated from her marriage when Sykes dies. This story is a tale about good and evil and that good will prevail. Textual Evidence: “Oh well, whatever goes over the Devil's back, is got to come under his belly. Sometime or ruther, Sykes, like everybody else, is gointer reap his sowing.”	Race & Society Theme: Racism and poverty shape the lives of those affected by them. Because Delia is Black, she is economically exploited, working seven days a week as a laundress. Delia, as a woman, is subordinate to Sykes although her income supports him. Hurston highlights the struggles women face within the Black community. Women are oppressed in society and this issue is not specific to any race. Hurston highlights that violence exists within the Black community too. Delia threatens Sykes that she will go tell on him to the white folks which shows readers that white folks are still considered superior in this society. Textual Evidence: “Perhaps her threat to go to the white folks had frightened Sykes! Perhaps he was sorry! Fifteen years of misery and suppression had brought Delia to the place where she would hope anything that looked towards a way over or through her wall of inhibitions.”

Constructed Response

Answers will vary.

Answer Key**"Sweat" by Zora Neale Hurston**
Biblical Allusions

Biblical Allusion	Meaning	Connection to the Text Explained
The River Jordan	The River Jordan is the source of all holy water in Christianity. It symbolizes spiritual rebirth and salvation.	Delia sings, "Jurden water, black an' col, / Chills de body, not de soul, / An' Ah wantah cross Jurden in uh calm time." Delia is singing about the River Jordan because Delia is seeking salvation and this scene foreshadows how Delia needs to be saved from her sin of letting Sykes die.
Gethsemane	Gethsemane is the garden outside Jerusalem; it is the scene of the agony and arrest of Jesus. It symbolizes a place of great mental or spiritual suffering.	"Delia's work-worn knees crawled over the earth in Gethsemane and up the rocks of Calvary many, many times during these months." Jesus prayed in the garden of Gethsemane the day before he was crucified, which could illustrate Delia as a Christ figure. While Sykes was publicly having an affair, she was facing great mental suffering.
The rocks of Calvary	The Crucifixion is believed to have occurred at the rocks of Calvary. The nailing of Jesus to the cross represents how Jesus died for the sins of others.	"Delia's work-worn knees crawled over the earth in Gethsemane and up the rocks of Calvary many, many times during these months." This allusion illustrates Delia as a Christ figure. She is paying for the sins of her husband. As he commits adultery, she is going through intense suffering and takes sacraments.

“My cup runneth over”	This saying means “I have more than enough for my needs.”	“Ah’m goin’ tuh de white folks bout you, mah young man, de very nex’ time you lay yo’ han’s on me. Mah cup is done run ovah.” Delia has reached her breaking point. While usually this is a phrase that is one of positive fulfillment, she is saying she has had enough of Sykes’s abuse and she will tell on him to the white folks if he hits her again. She is fulfilled with her religion, her home, and her job, and she doesn’t want Sykes.
Love feast	The practice of the lovefeast is a common meal of the early church. The lovefeast seeks to strengthen the bonds and the spirit of harmony, goodwill, and congeniality, as well as to forgive past disputes and instead love one another.	“She stayed to the night service—“love feast”—which was very warm and full of spirit. In the emotional winds her domestic trials were borne far and wide so that she sang as she drove homeward.” These lines show Delia’s commitment to the church and how much religion helps Delia in her everyday life to stay strong and positive.
Satan	Satan is also called the devil. He delights in destroying the lives of people through temptation because of his hatred of God.	“Whut’s de mattah, ol’ satan, you aint kickin’ up yo’ racket?” She addressed the snake’s box. Delia refers to the snake that Sykes brings home as Satan. Sykes is trying to overthrow Delia’s Heaven, by bringing home her worst nightmare, much like Satan tried to overthrow God’s heaven.
White clothing	In the Bible, white is a symbol of purity, innocence, honesty, righteousness, and cleanliness.	“He stepped roughly upon the whitest pile of things, kicking them helter-skelter as he crossed the room.” Sykes is soiling the pure white clothes with dirt as he kicks them around; he is purposefully destroying the life of his honest, innocent wife, with his impure soul.

Snakes	<p>Snakes (or serpents) are loathsome creatures associated with poison, sin, craftiness, and sometimes represent Satan. Snakes are also phallic symbols that represent male dominance.</p>	<p>"Sykes, what you throw dat whip on me like dat? You know it would skeer me—looks just like a snake, an' you knows how skeered Ah is of snakes."</p> <p>Delia first mistakes the bullwhip for a snake, then later on Sykes brings home an actual snake to scare her and show his dominance over her. The snake ends up killing Sykes. This symbolizes that Sykes was devoured by the devil for his arrogance and foolishness.</p>
Eve	<p>Eve was the first woman on earth. She was made by God to be a good companion to Adam as well as populate the Earth. In the Garden of Eden, Satan appeared as a snake to Eve, telling her to eat the apple that would cause humanity to be expelled from paradise forever. Eve gives into the temptation of eating the apple.</p>	<p>Delia is like Eve because she tends to her home as Eve tended to the Garden of Eden.</p> <p>"She had built it for her old days, and planted one by one the trees and flowers there. It was lovely to her, lovely."</p> <p>Delia also gives into temptation by allowing her husband's death to occur, with no attempt to intervene.</p>
Delilah	<p>The Philistines desired to find the source of Sampson's power, so they urged Delilah to figure it out for them. She tricked Sampson into falling in love with her, and then he revealed the secrets of his strength. She then betrayed him to the Philistines, thus leading him to his death. Delilah is remembered for her deception and her story is a warning to others to be careful who you trust.</p>	<p>Hurston may have named the protagonist Delia to draw a parallel between the two women. Although Delia did not put the snake in the house to kill Sykes, she still allowed him to die. In a way, Delia deceived Sykes because Sykes thought Delia was innocent and timid; he suspected she would do him no harm. In the end, she let him die so that she could have a better life, just like Delilah did to Sampson.</p>

How does Hurston use biblical allusions to emphasize and highlight the differences in morality between characters in the text?

Answers will vary.

"Sweat" by Zora Neale Hurston

It was eleven o'clock of a Spring night in Florida. It was Sunday. Any other night, Delia Jones would have been in bed for two hours by this time. But she was a wash-woman, and Monday morning meant a great deal to her. So she collected the soiled clothes on Saturday when she returned the clean things. Sunday night after church, she sorted them and put the white things to soak. It saved her almost a half day's start. A great hamper in the bedroom held the clothes that she brought home. It was so much neater than a number of bundles lying around.

She squatted in the kitchen floor beside the great pile of clothes, sorting them into small heaps according to color, and humming a song in a mournful key, but wondering through it all where Sykes, her husband, had gone with her horse and buckboard.

Just then something long, round, limp and black fell upon her shoulders and slithered to the floor beside her. A great terror took hold of her. It softened her knees and dried her mouth so that it was a full minute before she could cry out or move. Then she saw that it was the big bull whip her husband liked to carry when he drove.

She lifted her eyes to the door and saw him standing there bent over with laughter at her fright. She screamed at him.

"Sykes, what you throw dat whip on me like dat? You know it would skeer me—looks just like a snake, an' you knows how skeered Ah is of snakes."

"Course Ah knowed it! That's how come Ah done it." He slapped his leg with his hand and almost rolled on the ground in his mirth. "If you such a big fool dat you got to have a fit over a earth worm or a string, Ah don't keer how bad Ah skeer you."

"You aint got no business doing it. Gawd knows it's a sin. Some day Ah'm goin' tuh drop dead from some of yo' foolishness. 'Nother thing, where you been wid mah rig? Ah feeds dat pony. He aint fuh you to be drivin' wid no bull whip."

"You sho is one aggravatin' nigger woman!" he declared and stepped into the room. She resumed her work and did not answer him at

once. "Ah done tolle you time and again to keep them white folks' clothes outa dis house."

He picked up the whip and glared down at her. Delia went on with her work. She went out into the yard and returned with a galvanized tub and set it on the washbench. She saw that Sykes had kicked all of the clothes together again, and now stood in her way truculently, his whole manner hoping, praying, for an argument. But she walked calmly around him and commenced to re-sort the things.

"Next time, Ah'm gointer kick 'em outdoors," he threatened as he struck a match along the leg of his corduroy breeches.

Delia never looked up from her work, and her thin, stooped shoulders sagged further.

"Ah aint for no fuss t'night Sykes. Ah just come from taking sacrament at the church house."

He snorted scornfully. "Yeah, you just come from de church house on a Sunday night, but heah you is gone to work on them clothes. You aint nothing but a hypocrite. One of them amen-corner Christians—sing, whoop, and shout, then come home and wash white folks clothes on the Sabbath."

He stepped roughly upon the whitest pile of things, kicking them helter-skelter as he crossed the room. His wife gave a little scream of dismay, and quickly gathered them together again.

"Sykes, you quit grindin' dirt into these clothes! How can Ah git through by Sat'day if Ah don't start on Sunday?"

"Ah don't keer if you never git through. Anyhow, Ah done promised Gawd and a couple of other men, Ah aint gointer have it in mah house.

Don't gimme no lip neither, else Ah'll throw 'em out and put mah fist up side yo' head to boot." Delia's habitual meekness seemed to slip from her shoulders like a blown scarf. She was on her feet; her poor little body, her bare knuckly hands bravely defying the strapping hulk before her.

"Looka heah, Sykes, you done gone too fur. Ah been married to you fur fifteen years, and Ah been takin' in washin' for fifteen years. Sweat, sweat, sweat! Work and sweat, cry and sweat, pray and sweat!"

"What's that got to do with me?" he asked brutally.

"What's it got to do with you, Sykes? Mah tub of suds is filled yo' belly with vittles more times than yo' hands is filled it. Mah sweat is done paid for this house and Ah reckon Ah kin keep on sweatin' in it."

She seized the iron skillet from the stove and struck a defensive pose, which act surprised him greatly, coming from her. It cowed him and he did not strike her as he usually did.

"Now you won't," she panted, "that ole snaggle-toothed black woman you runnin' with aint comin' heah to pile up on mah sweat and blood. You aint paid for nothin' on this place, and Ah'm gointer stay right heah till Ah'm toted out foot foremost."

"Well, you better quit gittin' me riled up, else they'll be totin' you out sooner than you expect. Ah'm so tired of you Ah don't know whut to do. Gawd! how Ah hates skinny wimmen!" A little awed by this new Delia, he sidled out of the door and slammed the back gate after him. He did not say where he had gone, but she knew too well. She knew very well that he would not return until nearly daybreak also. Her work over, she went on to bed but not to sleep at once. Things had come to a pretty pass!

She lay awake, gazing upon the debris that cluttered their matrimonial trail. Not an image left standing along the way. Anything like flowers had long ago been drowned in the salty stream that had been pressed from her heart. Her tears, her sweat, her blood. She had brought love to the union and he had brought a longing after the flesh. Two months after the wedding, he had given her the first brutal beating. She had the memory of his numerous trips to Orlando with all of his wages when he had returned to her penniless, even before the first year had passed. She was young and soft then, but now she thought of her knotty, muscled limbs, her harsh knuckly hands, and drew herself up into an unhappy little ball in the middle of the big feather bed. Too late now to hope for love, even if it were not Bertha it would be someone else. This case differed from the others only in that she was bolder than the others. Too late for everything except her little home. She had built it for her old days, and planted one by one the trees and flowers there. It was lovely to her, lovely.

Somehow, before sleep came, she found herself saying aloud: "Oh well, whatever goes over the Devil's back, is got to come under his belly. Sometime or ruther, Sykes, like everybody else, is gointer reap his sowing." After that she was able to build a spiritual earthworks against her husband. His shells could no longer reach her. Amen. She went to sleep and slept until he announced his presence in bed by kicking her feet and rudely snatching the covers away. "Gimme some kivah heah, an' git yo' damn foots over on yo' own side! Ah oughter mash you in yo' mouf fuh drawing dat skillet on me." Delia went clear to the rail without answering him. A triumphant indifference to all that he was or did.

The week was as full of work for Delia as all other weeks, and Saturday found her behind her little pony, collecting and delivering clothes. It was a hot, hot day near the end of July. The village men on Joe Clarke's porch even chewed cane listlessly. They did not hurl the cane-knots as usual. They let them dribble over the edge of the porch. Even conversation had collapsed under the heat.

"Heah come Delia Jones," Jim Merchant said, as the shaggy pony came 'round the bend of the road toward them. The rusty buckboard was heaped with baskets of crisp, clean laundry.

"Yep," Joe Lindsay agreed. "Hot or col', rain or shine, jes ez reg'lar ez de weeks roll roun' Delia carries 'em an' fetches 'em on Sat'day."

"She better if she wanter eat," said Moss.

"Syke Jones aint wuth de shot an' powder hit would tek tuh kill 'em. Not to huh he aint."

"He sho' aint," Walter Thomas chimed in. "It's too bad, too, cause she wuz a right pritty lil trick when he got huh. Ah'd uh mah'ied huh mahseff if he hadnta beat me to it."

Delia nodded briefly at the men as she drove past.

"Too much knockin' will ruin any 'oman. He done beat huh 'nough tuh kill three women, let 'lone change they looks," said Elijah Moseley.

"How Syke kin stommuck dat big black greasy Mogul he's layin' roun wid, gits me. Ah swear dat eight-rock couldn't kiss a sardine can Ah done throwed out de back do' 'way las' yeah."

"Aw, she's fat, thass how come. He's allus been crazy 'bout fat women," put in Merchant. "He'd a' been tied up wid one long time ago if he could a' found one tuh have him. Did Ah tell yuh 'bout him come sidlin' roun' mah wife—bringin' her a basket uh pecans outa his yard fuh a present? Yessir, mah wife! She tol' him tuh take 'em right straight back home, cause Delia works so hard ovah dat washtub she reckon everything on de place taste lak sweat an' soapsuds. Ah jus' wisht Ah'd a' caught 'im 'dere! Ah'd a' made his hips ketch on fiah down dat shell road."

"Ah know he done it, too. Ah sees 'im grinnin' at every 'oman dat passes," Walter Thomas said. "But even so, he useter eat some mighty big hunks uh humble pie tuh git dat lil 'oman he got. She wuz ez pritty ez a speckled pup! Dat wuz fifteen yeahs ago. He useter be so-skeered uh losin' huh, she could make him do some parts of a husband's duty. Dey never wuz de same in de mind."

"There oughter be a law about him," said Lindsay. "He aint fit tuh carry guts tuh a bear." Clarke spoke for the first time. "Taint no law on earth dat kin make a man be decent if it aint in 'im. There's plenty men dat takes a wife lak dey do a joint uh sugar-cane. It's round, juicy an' sweet when dey gits it. But dey squeeze an' grind, squeeze an' grind an' wring tell dey wring every drop uh pleasure dat's in 'em out. When dey's satisfied dat dey is wrung dry, dey treats 'em jes lak dey do a cane-chew. Dey throws em away. Dey knows whut dey is doin' while dey is at it, an' hates theirselves fuh it but they keeps on hangin' after huh tell she's empty. Den dey hates huh fuh bein' a cane-chew an' in de way."

"We oughter take Syke an' dat stray 'oman uh his'n down in Lake Howell swamp an' lay on de rawhide till they cain't say Lawd a' mussy.' He allus wuz uh ovahbearin' niggah, but since dat white 'oman from up north done teached 'im how to run a automobile, he done got too biggety to live—an' we oughter kill 'im," Old Man Anderson advised.

A grunt of approval went around the porch. But the heat was melting their civic virtue, and Elijah Moseley began to bait Joe Clarke.

"Come on, Joe, git a melon outa dere an' slice it up for yo' customers. We'se all sufferin' wid de heat. De bear's done got me!"

"Thass right, Joe, a watermelon is jes' whut Ah needs tuh cure de eppizudicks," Walter Thomas joined forces with Moseley. "Come on dere, Joe. We all is steady customers an' you aint set us up in a long time. Ah chooses dat long, bowlegged Floridy favorite."

"A god, an' be dough. You all gimme twenty cents and slice way," Clarke retorted. "Ah needs a col' slice m'self. Heah, everybody chip in. Ah'll lend y'll mah meat knife."

The money was quickly subscribed and the huge melon brought forth. At that moment, Sykes and Bertha arrived. A determined silence fell on the porch and the melon was put away again.

Merchant snapped down the blade of his jackknife and moved toward the store door. "Come on in, Joe, an' gimme a slab uh sow belly an' uh pound uh coffee—almost fuhgots 'twas Sat'day. Got to git on home." Most of the men left also.

Just then Delia drove past on her way home, as Sykes was ordering magnificently for Bertha. It pleased him for Delia to see.

"Git whutsoever yo' heart desires, Honey. Wait a minute, Joe. Give huh two bottles uh strawberry soda-water, uh quart uh parched ground-peas, an' a block uh chewin' gum." With all this they left the store, with Sykes reminding Bertha that this was his town and she could have it if she wanted it.

The men returned soon after they left, and held their watermelon feast.

"Where did Syke Jones git da 'oman from nohow?" Lindsay asked.

"Ovah Apopka. Guess dey musta been cleanin' out de town when she lef'. She don't look lak a thing but a hunk uh liver wid hair on it."

"Well, she sho' kin squall," Dave Carter contributed. "When she gits ready tuh laff, she jes' opens huh mouf an' latches it back tuh de las' notch. No ole grandpa alligator down in Lake Bell ain't got nothin' on huh."

Bertha had been in town three months now. Sykes was still paying her room rent at Della Lewis'—the only house in town that would have taken her in. Sykes took her frequently to

Winter Park to "stomps." He still assured her that he was the swellest man in the state.

"Sho' you kin have dat lil' ole house soon's Ah kin git dat 'oman outa dere. Everything b'longs tuh me an' you sho' kin have it. Ah sho' 'bominates uh skinny 'oman. Lawdy, you sho' is got one portly shape on you! You kin git anything you wants. Dis is mah town an' you sho' kin have it."

Delia's work-worn knees crawled over the earth in Gethsemane and up the rocks of Calvary many, many times during these months. She avoided the villagers and meeting places in her efforts to be blind and deaf. But Bertha nullified this to a degree, by coming to Delia's house to call Sykes out to her at the gate.

Delia and Sykes fought all the time now with no peaceful interludes. They slept and ate in silence. Two or three times Delia had attempted a timid friendliness, but she was repulsed each time. It was plain that the breaches must remain agape.

The sun had burned July to August. The heat streamed down like a million hot arrows, smiting all things living upon the earth. Grass withered, leaves browned, snakes went blind in shedding and men and dogs went mad. Dog days!

Delia came home one day and found Sykes there before her. She wondered, but started to go on into the house without speaking, even though he was standing in the kitchen door and she must either stoop under his arm or ask him to move. He made no room for her. She noticed a soap box beside the steps, but paid no particular attention to it, knowing that he must have brought it there. As she was stooping to pass under his outstretched arm, he suddenly pushed her backward, laughingly.

"Look in de box dere Delia, Ah done brung yuh somethin'!"

She nearly fell upon the box in her stumbling, and when she saw what it held, she all but fainted outright.

"Syke! Syke, mah Gawd! You take dat rattlesnake 'way from heah! You gottuh. Oh, Jesus, have mussy!"

"Ah aint gut tuh do nuthin' uh de kin'-fact is Ah aint got tuh do nothin' but die. Taint no use uh you puttin' on airs makin' out lak you skeered uh dat snake—he's gointer stay right heah tell he

die. He wouldn't bite me cause Ah knows how tuh handle 'im. Nohow he wouldn't risk breakin' out his fangs 'gin yo' skinny laigs."

"Naw, now Syke, don't keep dat thing 'roun' heah tuh skeer me tuh death. You knows Ah'm even feared uh earth worms. Thass de biggest snake Ah evah did see. Kill 'im Syke, please."

"Doan ast me tuh do nothin' fuh yuh. Goin' roun' trying' tuh be so damn asterperious. Naw, Ah aint gonna kill it. Ah think uh damn sight mo' uh him dan you! Dat's a nice snake an' anybody doan lak 'im kin jes' hit de grit."

The village soon heard that Sykes had the snake, and came to see and ask questions. "How de hen-fire did you ketch dat six-foot rattler, Syke?" Thomas asked.

"He's full uh frogs so he caint hardly move, thass how. Ah eased up on 'm. But Ah'm a snake charmer an' knows how tuh handle 'em. Shux, dat aint nothin'. Ah could ketch one eve'y day if Ah so wanted tuh."

"Whut he needs is a heavy hick'ry club leaned real heavy on his head. Dat's de bes 'way tuh charm a rattlesnake."

"Naw, Walt, y'll jes' don't understand dese diamon' backs lak Ah do," said Sykes in a superior tone of voice.

The village agreed with Walter, but the snake stayed on. His box remained by the kitchen door with its screen wire covering. Two or three days later it had digested its meal of frogs and literally came to life. It rattled at every movement in the kitchen or the yard. One day as Delia came down the kitchen steps she saw his chalky-white fangs curved like scimitars hung in the wire meshes. This time she did not run away with averted eyes as usual. She stood for a long time in the doorway in a red fury that grew bloodier for every second that she regarded the creature that was her torment.

That night she broached the subject as soon as Sykes sat down to the table.

"Syke, Ah wants you tuh take dat snake 'way fum heah. You done starved me an' Ah put up widcher, you done beat me an Ah took dat, but you done kilt all mah insides bringin' dat varmint heah."

Sykes poured out a saucer full of coffee and drank it deliberately before he answered her.

"A whole lot Ah keer 'bout how you feels inside uh out. Dat snake aint goin' no damn wheah till

Ah gits ready fuh 'im tuh go. So fur as beatin' is concerned, yuh aint took near all dat you gointer take ef yuh stay 'roun' me."

Delia pushed back her plate and got up from the table. "Ah hates you, Sykes," she said calmly. "Ah hates you tuh de same degree dat Ah useter love yuh. Ah done took an' took till mah belly is full up tuh mah neck. Dat's de reason Ah got mah letter fum de church an' moved mah membership tuh Woodbridge—so Ah don't haf tuh take no sacrament wid yuh. Ah don't wantuh see yuh 'roun' me atall. Lay 'roun' wid dat 'oman all yuh wants tuh, but gwan 'way fum me an' mah house. Ah hates yuh lak uh suck-egg dog."

Sykes almost let the huge wad of corn bread and collard greens he was chewing fall out of his mouth in amazement. He had a hard time whipping himself up to the proper fury to try to answer Delia.

"Well, Ah'm glad you does hate me. Ah'm sho' tiahed uh you hangin' ontuh me. Ah don't want yuh. Look at yuh stringey ole neck! Yo' rawbony laigs an' arms is enough tuh cut uh man tuh death. You looks jes' lak de devvul's doll-baby tuh me. You cain't hate me no worse dan Ah hates you. Ah been hatin' you fuh years."

"Yo' ole black hide don't look lak nothin' tuh me, but uh passle uh wrinkled up rubber, wid yo' big ole yeahs flappin' on each side lak uh pahuh uh buzzard wings. Don't think Ah'm gointuh be run 'way fum mah house neither. Ah'm goin' tuh de white folks bout you, mah young man, de very nex' time you lay yo' han's on me. Mah cup is done run ovah." Delia said this with no signs of fear and Sykes departed from the house, threatening her, but made not the slightest move to carry out any of them.

That night he did not return at all, and the next day being Sunday, Delia was glad she did not have to quarrel before she hitched up her pony and drove the four miles to Woodbridge.

She stayed to the night service—"love feast"—which was very warm and full of spirit. In the emotional winds her domestic trials were borne far and wide so that she sang as she drove homeward.

"Jurden water, black an' col'
Chills de body, not de soul
An' Ah wantah cross Jurden in uh calm time."

She came from the barn to the kitchen door and stopped.

"Whut's de mattah, ol' satan, you aint kickin' up yo' racket?" She addressed the snake's box. Complete silence. She went on into the house with a new hope in its birth struggles. Perhaps her threat to go to the white folks had frightened Sykes! Perhaps he was sorry! Fifteen years of misery and suppression had brought Delia to the place where she would hope anything that looked towards a way over or through her wall of inhibitions.

She felt in the match safe behind the stove at once for a match. There was only one there. "Dat niggah wouldn't fetch nothin' heah tuh save his rotten neck, but he kin run thew whut Ah brings quick enough. Now he done toted off nigh on tuh haff uh box uh matches. He done had dat 'oman heah in mah house, too."

Nobody but a woman could tell how she knew this even before she struck the match. But she did and it put her into a new fury.

Presently she brought in the tubs to put the white things to soak. This time she decided she need not bring the hamper out of the bedroom; she would go in there and do the sorting. She picked up the pot-bellied lamp and went in. The room was small and the hamper stood hard by the foot of the white iron bed. She could sit and reach through the bedposts—resting as she worked.

"Ah wantah cross Jurden in uh calm time," she was singing again. The mood of the "love feast" had returned. She threw back the lid of the basket almost gaily. Then, moved by both horror and terror, she sprang back toward the door. There lay the snake in the basket! He moved sluggishly at first, but even as she turned round and round, jumped up and down in an insanity of fear, he began to stir vigorously. She saw him pouring his awful beauty from the basket upon the bed, then she seized the lamp and ran as fast as she could to the kitchen. The wind from the open door blew out the light and the darkness added to her terror. She sped to the darkness of the yard, slamming the door after her before she thought to set down the lamp. She did not feel safe even on the ground, so she climbed up in the hay barn.

There for an hour or more she lay sprawled upon the hay a gibbering wreck. Finally, she grew quiet, and after that, coherent thought. With this, stalked through her a cold, bloody rage. Hours of this. A period of introspection, a space of retrospection, then a mixture of both. Out of this an awful calm.

"Well, Ah done de bes' Ah could. If things aint right, Gawd knows taint mah fault."

She went to sleep—a twitch sleep—and woke up to a faint gray sky. There was a loud hollow sound below. She peered out. Sykes was at the wood-pile, demolishing a wire-covered box. He hurried to the kitchen door, but hung outside there some minutes before he entered, and stood some minutes more inside before he closed it after him.

The gray in the sky was spreading. Delia descended without fear now, and crouched beneath the low bedroom window. The drawn shade shut out the dawn, shut in the night. But the thin walls held back no sound.

"Dat ol' scratch is woke up now!" She mused at the tremendous whirr inside, which every woodsman knows, is one of the sound illusions. The rattler is a ventriloquist. His whirr sounds to the right, to the left, straight ahead, behind, close under foot—everywhere but where it is. Woe to him who guesses wrong unless he is prepared to hold up his end of the argument! Sometimes he strikes without rattling at all. Inside, Sykes heard nothing until he knocked a pot lid off the stove while trying to reach the match safe in the dark. He had emptied his pockets at Bertha's.

The snake seemed to wake up under the stove and Sykes made a quick leap into the bedroom. In spite of the gin he had had, his head was clearing now.

"Mah Gawd!" he chattered, "ef Ah could on'y strack uh light!"

The rattling ceased for a moment as he stood paralyzed. He waited. It seemed that the snake waited also.

"Oh, fuh de light! Ah thought he'd be too sick"—Sykes was muttering to himself when the whirr began again, closer, right underfoot this time.

Long before this, Sykes' ability to think had been flattened down to primitive instinct and he leaped—onto the bed.

Outside Delia heard a cry that might have come from a maddened chimpanzee, a stricken gorilla. All the terror, all the horror, all the rage that man possibly could express, without a recognizable human sound.

A tremendous stir inside there, another series of animal screams, the intermittent whirr of the reptile. The shade torn violently down from the window, letting in the red dawn, a huge brown hand seizing the window stick, great dull blows upon the wooden floor punctuating the gibberish of sound long after the rattle of the snake had abruptly subsided. All this Delia could see and hear from her place beneath the window, and it made her ill. She crept over to the four-o'clocks and stretched herself on the cool earth to recover.

She lay there. "Delia. Delia!" She could hear Sykes calling in a most despairing tone as one who expected no answer. The sun crept on up, and he called. Delia could not move—her legs were gone flabby. She never moved, he called, and the sun kept rising.

"Mah Gawd!" She heard him moan, "Mah Gawd fum Heben!" She heard him stumbling about and got up from her flower-bed. The sun was growing warm. As she approached the door she heard him call out hopefully, "Delia, is dat you Ah heah?"

She saw him on his hands and knees as soon as she reached the door. He crept an inch or two toward her—all that he was able, and she saw his horribly swollen neck and his one open eye shining with hope. A surge of pity too strong to support bore her away from that eye that must, could not, fail to see the tubs. He would see the lamp. Orlando with its doctors was too far. She could scarcely reach the Chinaberry tree, where she waited in the growing heat while inside she knew the cold river was creeping up and up to extinguish that eye which must know by now that she knew.

PREVIEW
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SWEAT
NOT FOR EDUCATIONAL USE
BY ZORA NEALE HURSTON



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AUTHOR BACKGROUND



- Zora Neale Hurston is an American anthropologist, folklorist, journalist, filmmaker, and writer who rose to fame as an influential artist during the Harlem Renaissance.
- Hurston wrote about the language, lives, and customs of Black individuals and communities from her own personal experiences.
- She was born in Alabama in 1891, but she was raised in Eatonville, Florida, a historically all-Black town.
- Arguably her most famous piece of work is the novel, *Their Eyes Were Watching God*, published in 1937.
- After her mother's death in 1904, Hurston dropped out of high school and soon thereafter joined a traveling theatrical company.
- While traveling with her troupe, she needed an emergency appendectomy at Maryland General Hospital.

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AUTHOR BACKGROUND

- From there, she decided to stay in Baltimore to complete the remainder of her high school requirements.
- After high school, Hurston enrolled at Howard University in Washington, D.C. and earned her associates degree.
- In 1921, Hurston published her first story "John Redding Goes to Sea," in the Howard literary magazine *Stylus*.
- In 1925, Hurston submitted the short story "Spunk" and the play "Color Struck" to a literary contest sponsored by *Opportunity* and won second place for both pieces.
- She then received a scholarship to Barnard College in NYC where she studied anthropology with the scholar Franz Boas.
- In New York, Hurston met several young black artists and became a part of the historical, intellectual movement known as the Harlem Renaissance.



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HARLEM RENAISSANCE

- The Harlem Renaissance was the cultural revival of African American music, dance, art, fashion, literature, theater and politics centered in Harlem, New York during the 1920s.
- Black Americans used the arts and academia to celebrate African American culture and call attention to the harsh realities for Black people in America, especially in the rural South.
- Hundreds of thousands of African Americans relocated to urban cities like New York to seek better economic, social, political, and civil opportunities because there was still a great deal of racism and white supremacy in the South in addition to a massive labor shortage.
- Black Americans from all walks of life came together and shared their experiences of racial oppression and determination of living freely.
- Hurston died of heart disease on January 28, 1960.



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SWEAT

PREVIEW



- In the summer of 1926, Hurston, along with Langston Hughes and Wallace Thurman organized an African-American literary magazine called *FIRE!*.
- The first and only issue featured Hurston's short story "Sweat."
- "Sweat" takes place in Florida during the 1920s.
- The setting shows great similarities to Eatonville, where Hurston grew up.
- In the rural South, many Black Americans spoke in a dialect known as African American Vernacular English.
- Hurston makes sure to include this dialect in the dialogue of her stories to bring the characters to life and accurately depict the setting.

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HISTORICAL CONTEXT

- The protagonist of “Sweat,” Delia Jones, holds a job as a “washwoman.”
- A washwoman is a laundress or someone who does laundry for others for a living.
- The automatic washing machine wasn’t introduced until 1937.
- Southern culture was strongly shaped by religion.
- During slavery, the bible was a source of strength in African American culture because the ideals promoted the notion that all men were created equal in the sight of God.
- This message resonated with slaves and provided them with hope that they would one day be free.
- The practice of faith and religion remained prominent in the South for both white and Black Americans after slavery was abolished.
- Sundays, known as Sabbath, are observed among Christians as a day of rest and worship.



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HISTORICAL CONTEXT

- Although Hurston was not born into slavery, she incorporates the relatively recent experiences of slavery and the consequent enslaved mindset into the characters of her stories.
- Mentioned in the story “Sweat” is a bullwhip, which is a single-tailed whip, usually made of braided leather or nylon, designed as a tool for working with livestock.
- The bullwhip makes a loud pop noise when struck, thus scaring the livestock and getting them to cooperate.
- During slavery, slaveowners were legally allowed to whip their slaves as a brutal tactic for punishment or to impose their authority over their slaves.
- It caused severe and horrific injuries such as torn skin, bruises, blood loss and permanent scars.



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MIRTH

PREVIEW

NOT FOR EDUCATIONAL USE

- **noun**
- **a state of amusement or enjoyment through laughter**

PREVIEW

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PREVIEW

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PREVIEW

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TRUCULENTLY PREVIEW

NOT FOR EDUCATIONAL USE

- adverb
- in an aggressive way, that is belligerent, cruel, or harsh

PREVIEW

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COMMENCE REVIEW

NOT FOR EDUCATIONAL USE

- verb
- to begin

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SCORNFULLY

NOT FOR EDUCATIONAL USE

- adverb
- in a way that shows attitude or
disrespect

PREVIEW

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HELTER-SKELTER

NOT FOR EDUCATIONAL USE

- adverb
- in disorderly haste and a reckless manner

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MEEKNESS

PREVIEW

NOT FOR EDUCATIONAL USE

- **noun**
- **the condition of being submissive and timid**

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LISTLESSLY

PREVIEW

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- adverb
- characterized by lack of interest or energy

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NULLIFY PREVIEW

NOT **verb** FOR EDUCATIONAL USE
•to cancel out

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ASTERPERIOUS

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•adjective
•arrogantly superior and disdainful

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BROACH PREVIEW

•verb NOT FOR EDUCATIONAL USE
•to bring up a sensitive or difficult subject
for discussion

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QUARREL

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- verb
- to have a heated argument

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INHIBITIONS

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- **noun**
- **feelings that makes one self-conscious to act in a relaxed and natural way**

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GIBBERING

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- **adjective**
- **describes speaking rapidly typically through fear or shock**

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COHERENT

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- **adjective**
- **describes logical and orderly**

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WOE

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•noun
•great sorrow or distress

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