

REVISION CHECKLIST FOR FORMAL ESSAYS

Their Eyes Were Watching God

- Review proper MLA format. Be sure your paper follows MLA format, including a heading (your name, teacher's name, class, date), a header (Last name and page number in the upper right corner of each page), a title, and one-inch margins. Your paper should also be typed, double-spaced throughout, and be written in Times New Roman font, size 11 or 12.
- Avoid the use of "I" and "you". Obviously, you are writing this essay and by definition an essay contains the opinions of the author. Therefore, if you write "I believe", or "I think" at the beginning of a sentence, you are being redundant. The reader knows this is your essay and therefore the reader knows these are your ideas. Do not waste your reader's time stating the obvious! Likewise, do not use "you" in an essay, which at times can sound accusatorial. Instead, use "the reader", or "a person", or "one". Your essay should be written to a general audience and not a specific person, as "you" would suggest.
- Use an elevated vocabulary. Words such as "get", "got", "a lot", "stuff", "big", etc. need to be removed from your vocabulary and replaced with words that are more specific and meaningful. In your writing, you are attempting to convince your reader of your point of view and argument about your chosen topic. In order to be successful in that endeavor, your language and vocabulary need to reflect your intelligence and devotion to your beliefs. You want your essay to sound as "smart" as possible; the words you choose will help to convey that idea. If your essay does not sound "smart", your chances of convincing your reader are greatly reduced. Likewise, do NOT use contractions ("don't"), clichés, or slang in your essay. Your formal writing should sound like a speech not a conversation one might overhear in the hallway.
- Make sure you have a *title* that is both descriptive and creative. Your title is the very first opportunity to capture your reader's attention. Use it to your advantage and put your best foot forward!! Do not bold face or underline your title.
- Use the introductory paragraph to capture your reader's attention. By the end of the first paragraph, the reader will have decided whether or not he or she wants to continue reading your essay. Be sure that you create an effective "hook" to draw the reader into your writing and establish a purpose for reading (i.e. be sure that you explain what the reader will gain from reading your essay). Somewhere within your introduction, usually toward the very end, you will place a focused thesis statement.
- Review the prompt. Be sure that you are addressing all of the required components of the prompt and that your thesis and your essay adequately support and explain the assigned topic. Failure to do this always leads to having to re-write the essay. Double-check your rough draft to make sure that all of the "key words" and "key ideas" of the prompt are sufficiently covered and developed throughout your essay.

- ❑ Create a specific and engaging thesis statement. Your thesis statement is the most important sentence in your essay. In this one sentence you summarize your entire argument. A good thesis statement is comprised of three parts: the subject, the method, and the message. The *subject* identifies the piece(s) of literature and the author(s) you are writing about, the *method* states the literary feature(s) the author(s) used, and the *message* describes the main point or argument the author(s) is/are making.
- ❑ Use in-text citations. When using quotations from literature as evidence in your essay, be sure to cite the author's last name and the page number in parenthesis. This is called an in-text citation. Also, be sure to format your citations in proper MLA format. This means that you close your quotations marks, hit the space bar, place the page or line number in parenthesis, and finally add a period.

EXAMPLE: "Dawn and doom was in the branches" (Hurston 8).

- ❑ Cite quotations of characters within the quotations of your essay correctly. Double quotations marks are used for you to identify what material you have taken from the text. Within that quotation single quotation marks are used to show what appears in quotation marks within the work itself.

EXAMPLE: Janie comes to the full realization of how bad her marriage is when Logan yells, "'Janie!' Logan called harshly. 'Come help me move dis manure pile befo' de sun gits hot'" (Hurston 31).

- ❑ Use present-tense verbs rather than past-tense verbs when writing an essay about literature. However, do NOT change the verb tense *within* a quotation.

EXAMPLE: In *Their Eyes Were Watching God*, Hurston writes metaphorically.

- ❑ Use of evidence. As a general rule, there should be at least three quotations within each of your body paragraphs. However, if you are expressing complex ideas or are covering a broad topic in that paragraph, you may need more than three quotations. Remember, we are doing two things in a body paragraph: (1) offering evidence (the facts of the case), and (2) explaining how that evidence pertains to the argument we are making. Make sure you are doing both of these things in your body paragraphs and make sure you are offering at least three pieces of evidence within each body paragraph.
- ❑ Be sure that you use topic sentences and concluding sentences in your body paragraphs. Your reader needs some direction and help in moving through the content of your paper. Simple topic and concluding sentences make your reader's job much easier and increase your chances of convincing your reader of your argument. These sentences should identify the sub-topic of your thesis statement that you are attempting to convince your reader of in that particular paragraph.
- ❑ Be sure to include a proper MLA Works Cited page listing any and all works you cite within your paper. The bibliographic entry for the novel is as follows:

Hurston, Zora Neale. *Their Eyes Were Watching God*. New York: Perennial Classics, 1998.