Margaret Thatcher once said, “If you want something said, ask a man; if you want something done, ask a woman.” When you see this quote, what pops up in your mind? Do you think of the accuracy of the statement? Does the history of oppression against women, particularly black women pop up in your mind? Do you think of how this statement alone can empower many women? Well for me, all those questions entered my thoughts, and the one book that sheds even more light on this would be, *Their Eyes Were Watching God* by Zora Neale Huston. Ms. Huston opens us to seeing how black women were viewed and treated by the black man. We also see how Huston breaks down inter-racial barriers, sexism, false promises and how to never give up what you really want out of life. This classic feature also empowers not only black women, but women in general.

“There are years that ask questions and years that answer. Janie had had no chance to know things, so she had to ask. Did marriage end the cosmic loneliness of the unmated? Did marriage compel love like the sun the day?” (63). The journey of our main character, Janie, has been a long one with many trials and tribulations. Janie had the fantasy of every female, to one day find and marry her true love, but after Janie’s grandmother, Nanny, killed that dream for a while when she married Janie off at seventeen to Logan Killicks. Janie’s first marriage showed her to never force yourself to love anyone for someone else’s benefit. Her marriage also taught her that she should not have to settle because it will provide you a safety net because life if full of surprises and mishaps. She did not come to realize this until she met her second husband Joseph Starks when Logan went to Lake city to see about a mule; little did Janie know not only was she fighting for what she wanted, she was also taking one step on her journey of empowerment.

Before Janie ran off with Joe he promised that he would not make a dog out Janie, but his wife, and that he would treat her like a lady is supposed to be treated (75). Parts of that promise only lasted for maybe a few months. After they moved to Eatonville, Joe began building the town and soon became the mayor. That is when things went south, and Joe turned into a very patriarchal man. This also gave an example of how men oppressed women. One prime quote would be when the people asked for Janie to say a few words, and Joe interceded saying, “Thank yuh fuh yo’ compliments, but mah wife don’t know nothin’ ‘bout no speech makin’. Ah never married her for nothin’ lak dat. She’s uh women and her place is in de home.” (43) That statement alone made it seem that the only thing Janie can do is cooking and cleaning which demeans in every aspects. Joe thinks of Janie as his little trophy that is made for only him, so when he catches the men of the town like Walter rubbing his hands in Janie’s hair, he started to treat Janie harshly. (55) Joe would yell at her because of the smallest things and portray his issues and jealousy onto her like everything is her fault. He did not allow her to do the mail or take the rent. (55) These are a few of the many examples of Joe’s patriarchal nature towards Janie, and that ultimately caused him to pull away from Janie.

“Sometimes God gits familiar wid us womenfolk too and talks His inside business. He told me how surprise He was ‘bout y’all turning out so smart after Him makin’ yuh different; and how surprised y’all is goin’ tuh be if you ever find out you don’t know half as much ‘bout us as you think you do. It’seasy to make yo’- self out God Almighty when you ain’t got nothin’ tuh strain against but women and chicken.”

The quote above shows another step that Janie has taken to her empowerment. Janie explained to Joe as well as the other men in the town that they are not as smart as they think they are. She also let them know that God entrust the women with His work because they have more sense and do not let their egos get in the way of getting a task done. Seeing Janie speak up like that shocked and bothered Joe. He was supposed to be the alpha male, the mayor of the Eatonville, and here is his wife belittling him in front of the men that are supposed to look up to him. That led Joe to start putting Janie down and excluding her from things, especially when he noticed that he was getting old. In the text, Joe told Janie that she was an old hen, and that she does not need to be outside jumping around because that is what young people do and she wouldn’t be able to get out of bed (77). Joe’s intentions were to make Janie feel bad about her age just as much as he did. This did the exact opposite though. Janie did not feel sorry for herself in fact she had enough of the criticism and taunting from Joe so, one night she stood up for herself yet again against Joe. This time the whole town saw the confrontation. She pointed out his weight, his erectile dysfunction, and that fact that he was ten years older than her (79). Those statement led Joe to do the one thing he swore to never do, he hit Janie. As things start to go in a downward spiral for Janie and Joe’s marriage, Joe gets sick and right before he died Janie decided to finally tell him all the things she has been meaning to say for all these years. Joe did not want to hear any of it. He past still stuck in the ways that some may say led him to his death bed.

Janie tried to mourn as long as the town wanted her too, but with her newly founded freedom it was kind of hard. One night while everyone in the town was away she met Tea Cake, a man that was at least ten years or so younger than her but made her feel like she was the only girl in the world. The night they first met he asked her to play checkers with him (95). This was something she had never done before because neither of her previous husbands taught her, so this meant everything to her. Tea Cake made her feel very powerful and empowered. He wanted to know her thoughts, how her mind worked, and how she felt. He never wanted her to worry about whether he would run off with someone younger or if he loved her as much as she loved him. “Janie, Ah hope God may kill me, if Ah’m lyin’. Nobody else on earth kin hold uh candle tuh you, baby. You got de keys to de kingdom. (198)” That statement warmed Janie’s heart because finally got the one thing she’s been looking for all this time, true love. Soon after that Janie and Tea Cake were married and moved to the Glades to work on the muck. Everything we was peaches and cream for the most part until the storm hit. They did end up getting away from the storm, but Tea Cake got bit by a dog that had rabies. Once the storm was over, the ended up going back home to see who survived, and that’s when Janie discovered that Tea Cake was not feeling well and he contracted the mad dog disease. Tea Cake had missed the timeframe for the cure, so Janie was to stay far away from him. Janie did what the doctor told her to do, but soon Tea Cake got worse, and tried to kill her. So, she did the only thing she could do, kill Tea Cake in self-defense. Janie was arrested and trialed for the death of Tea Cake, and by the grace of God the jury understood why she did it. She was acquitted of all charges, put almost her money towards he funeral for the love of her life, and returned to Eatonville with a new outlook on life and love.

In conclusion, this story has had many ups and downs, and Janie’s journey towards true love as well as empowerment has been a difficult one. The first time she married it was to please her Nanny. The second time her husband, Joe, did not turn out to be who she thought he was, but he played a crucial part in Janie’s road to empowerment. He taught her that she should not stay silent or be pushed around, but to speak up whenever something was bothering her. Her last husband showed her what real love feels and looks like. He helped her complete her journey to empowerment by letting her be herself, and showed her that women are supposed to be treated queens, and that sometime you have to make decision that will hurt you sometimes for the greater good.