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II.ročník – prezenční studium

Obor: Učitelství anglického jazyka pro střední školy a druhý stupeň základních škol -  
Učitelství základů společenských věd a občanské výchovy pro střední školy a druhý stupeň  
základních škol

## **Women Writers of the Harlem Renaissance**

A Comparative Analysis of Works by Zora Neale Hurston and Nella Larsen

### **Diplomová práce**

Vedoucí práce: Mgr. Andrea Hoffmannová, Ph.D.

OLOMOUC 2015

Prohlašuji, že jsem závěrečnou práci vypracovala samostatně a použila jen uvedených pramenů a literatury.

V Olomouci dne 14.4.2015

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vlastnoruční podpis

## **Acknowledgement**

In the first place, I would like to thank wholeheartedly my supervisor, Mgr. Andrea Hoffmannová, Ph.D., for her helpful and valuable comments and guidance while I was writing my diploma thesis. I would also like to thank to all my family, especially my parents and my boyfriend for their support and patience. Thirdly, I would like to thank my classmate Bc. Jan Gregar, who helped me a lot with the corrections and language editing of this thesis.

# TABLE OF CONTENTS

<b>ABSTRACT</b> .....	6
<b>INTRODUCTION</b> .....	7
<b>THEORETICAL PART</b> .....	11
<b>1 THE PERIOD OF HARLEM RENAISSANCE</b> .....	11
1.1 Overview.....	11
1.2 Development.....	13
1.3 The city of Harlem.....	14
1.4 Harlem Renaissance in literature.....	15
1.5 Characteristics and themes .....	16
1.6 A new black identity.....	17
1.7 Criticism of the movement.....	18
<b>2 WOMEN WRITERS OF THE HARLEM RENAISSANCE</b> .....	20
<b>2.1 ZORA NEALE HURSTON</b> .....	20
2.1.1 Personal life.....	20
2.1.2 Literary career and works of Zora Neale Hurston.....	22
<b>2.2 NELLA LARSEN</b> .....	23
2.2.1 Personal life.....	23
2.2.2 Literary career and works of Nella Larsen.....	24
<b>PRACTICAL PART</b> .....	26
<b>1 INTRODUCTION</b> .....	26
1.1 Research questions.....	26
<b>2 ANALYSIS OF THE BOOK <i>THEIR EYES WERE WATCHING GOD</i> BY ZORA NEALE HURSTON</b> .....	28
2.1 Plot Overview.....	28
2.2 Setting.....	29
2.3 Analysis of the main characters.....	30
2.4 Themes of the book.....	33

<b>3 ANALYSIS OF THE BOOK <i>QUICKSAND</i> BY NELLA LARSEN</b> .....	35
3.1 Plot Overview.....	35
3.2 Setting.....	36
3.3 Analysis of the main characters.....	36
3.4 Themes of the book.....	39
<b>4 COMPARISON OF THESE TWO BOOKS</b> .....	42
4.1 Analysis of the language.....	42
4.2 Setting.....	45
4.3 Main characters.....	46
4.4 Structure of the books.....	48
4.5 Similarities and differences.....	49
<b>5 POSSIBLE USE OF THE BOOKS IN ENGLISH LANGUAGE TEACHING</b> ...51	
5.1 Target students.....	51
5.2 Discussion themes and questions.....	52
5.3 Benefits of using books in English lessons.....	53
5.4 Commentary on the lesson plans.....	56
5.4.1 Lesson Plan 1.....	56
5.4.2 Lesson Plan 2.....	58
<b>6 CONCLUSIONS</b> .....	60
BIBLIOGRAPHY.....	62
APPENDICES.....	65
RÉSUMÉ.....	76
ANNOTATION.....	77

## **ABSTRACT**

The aim of this thesis is to take a closer look on the period of the Harlem Renaissance and to analyze two books written by Afro-American women writers. In the first part, the thesis deals with the novels *Their Eyes Were Watching God* by Zora Neale Hurston and *Quicksand* by Nella Larsen. In the second part the thesis deals with the topic of using literature when teaching English language. It provides lesson plans and practical advice for the teachers and suggests specific activities.

## INTRODUCTION

Because I have always been an avid reader, I did not have to think about the topic of my diploma thesis for long. Lately, I focused my attention especially on the books published by the Afro-American writers. All of the books, I have already read, have got a spirit. It does not matter if it was *Native Son* by Richard Wright, *The Bluest Eye* by Toni Morrison, or Alice Walker's *The Color Purple*. So I decided to continue exploring the Afro-American literature and read more. When I chose the topic of my diploma thesis I simply combined the business with pleasure. Since I wrote a literary thesis about the Harlem Renaissance movement one year ago, I become very interested in it. This cultural movement represents the most influential movement in the Afro-American literary history. It emerged in the early 20<sup>th</sup> century and in many ways it ushered in the Civil Rights Movement of the late 1940s and early 1950s.<sup>1</sup> During this time, Harlem was a cultural centre where intelligent people, artists, musicians and writers gathered. Most of these people came from the South in order to escape the local oppressive system and to find a place where they could freely express themselves. This period is characterized by a huge flowering of the Afro-American culture, which become very popular not only among the black people. During this period, many influential writers, singers and poets appeared.

The aim of my diploma thesis is to take a closer look on the period of the Harlem Renaissance and the Harlem Renaissance movement. I chose two of the Afro-American women authors, Nella Larsen and Zora Neale Hurston, who both published during the Harlem Renaissance period, to compare. I will analyze their novels *Quicksand* and *Their Eyes Were Watching God*. I will take a closer look at the main characters, the themes of the novels, the settings and also the language. After the analysis I would like to compare these books. Because both of the authors published during the same period and both are important figures of the Harlem Renaissance, I would like to find out if their works are similar.

Zora Neale Hurston and Nella Larsen are two novelists who represent women writers of the Harlem Renaissance. They were both black women from various backgrounds who decided to portray the roles of black women and the issue of identity and racism in their work. Both of these female protagonists are struggling to find happiness and they have to

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<sup>1</sup> Civil Rights Movement. History [online]. 2013 [cit. 2015-03-22]. Available at: <http://www.history.com/topics/black-history/civil-rights-movement>

solve similar problems. They are trying to achieve self-realization and to find their true identity throughout their lives. It is nicely portrayed in these novels, how it was sometimes difficult to be a black woman in a white world in the past and maybe still it is nowadays. That is the reason why I chose these authors. Their books are partly autobiographical and they realistically depicts, what is totally unknown for us, as the readers. Both novels are inspired by a real experience and give us an authentic image of the lives of the black women during the Harlem Renaissance period.

Nella Larsen's *Quicksand* is a novel which presents the life of a interracial protagonist Helga Crane. She is a mulatto child forced to leave the South when she was a young woman. Helga is a strong personality but she is not able to settle down and to be happy in her life because she does not belong to the black nor the white society. She does not have a family. She feels excluded and faces the problem of racial identity for the entire life. Helga tries to live in different places and to be happy but she is not successful. She experiences "*a lack somewhere*"<sup>2</sup> and she is not able to find a contentment in herself.

Zora Neale Huston's *Their Eyes Were Watching God* deals with the the life of Janie Crawford. The reader of the book is invited to go through a story of her life. She is a black woman born in poor conditions but living in an economic stability. During her life, she goes through many relationships and marriages in order to find a true love. She is continuously judged by a black community for her choices. Janie is trying to defend her own space in the world and to fight for freedom and love. Unlike Helga, Janie is able to find a true love but unfortunately, her happiness does not last long.

My diploma thesis is divided into the two main parts – theoretical part and a practical part. At the beginning I will examine the period of the Harlem Renaissance itself. I will present basic facts and definitions from various sources in order to introduce the reader to this topic. I will also provide the basic facts about the authors Nella Larsen and Zora Neale Hurston. I will introduce the reader into their lives, works and literary careers.

Before the analysis of the novels *Quicksand* and *Their Eyes Were Watching God*, it is necessary to examine the period of the Harlem Renaissance and the Harlem Renaissance movement. This is done in the first chapter of my diploma thesis. I would like to acquaint

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2 LARSEN, Nella and Thadious M DAVIS. *Quicksand*. New York: Penguin Books, 2002, xxxvii, 154 p. ISBN 01-411-8127-3.



the reader with the information about how did this movement gradually developed and why. I will examine the main reasons which led to the Great migration and why people suddenly began to move to the urban north of the United States. I will also describe, which cities become the center of this movement.

In the second part of my diploma thesis I would like to analyze the two novels – *Quicksand* and *Their Eyes Were Watching God*. I will describe the main protagonists and their appearance, characteristics and the relationships they go through their lives. I will also briefly introduce the main plot of the books. A special emphasis will be put to the themes of the novels. After that, there is a comparison of the similarities and differences in these books - I will compare the language used, the setting of the novels and the main characters.

The last chapter of my diploma thesis will focus on the theme of using the books when teaching English language to the learners. This method of using literature when teaching English language is very useful. I think that it is a pity that this method is not yet much used by the teachers. It is very effective because English books are the best source of authentic English language. Not only the students will practice basic skills like reading, speaking or writing, but using books will also increase their understanding of the target language and real-life communication. Students can learn new lexical items or phrases and other features of the target language. It is the teacher's role to choose suitable materials and to use various methods. The more diverse and interesting the lessons are, the more beneficial it is for the learners. When using books, it is therefore necessary not only to select suitable literary texts but also to take into account the age and the level of the students.

In order to convert theory into practice I attached two lesson plans. The first lesson plan deals with Nela Larsen's *Quicksand* and the second one deals with Zora Neale Hurston's *Their Eyes Were Watching God*. Both of these lesson plans are designed for a ninety minutes lesson or seminar. I chose several activities for students in order not only to practice basic skills but also to make the students really interested in the novels. I would like the students to really work with the book and to get some new and useful information.

The teacher should bear in mind that it may be the only opportunity for the students to encounter some interesting and inspiring pieces of literature. If the parents of the students do not read at all or they do not have time for it and the student is not a passionate reader itself,

it is very probable that the student does not know, what to read and where to find it. The teacher should not be afraid of using modern methods when teaching English language, especially if it is obviously beneficial for the learners. It is evident that not all of the students will appreciate this but at least for some of them, it can be enriching and it will help them to discovered world masterpieces that are definitely worth it.

# THEORETICAL PART

In the theoretical part of my diploma thesis, I would like to describe the basic facts about the Harlem Renaissance movement. I am going to analyse how and when did it start and what exactly happened. This movement is still important until the present days. I chose two women writers of this period – Zora Neale Hurston and Nella Larsen - I would like to describe their life, literary career and their importance.

## 1 THE PERIOD OF HARLEM RENAISSANCE

### 1.1 Overview

The period of Harlem Renaissance can be dated back to the beginning of the 20<sup>th</sup> century. It is also known under the term New Negro Movement. This term is known from an influential book called *The New Negro* which was written in 1925 by famous American writer Alain Locke. The term New Negro represented the independent black people who lived in northern cities of the United States.

Harlem Renaissance can be defined as a cultural movement typical of flowering of the Afro-American culture and it deeply influenced the whole lifestyle of American people, the music they listened, the art they admired, the politics in their country and also their literature.<sup>3</sup> Already from the term Harlem Renaissance it can be recognized that it concerns the Afro-American people, who moved to the New York City. The term Renaissance suggests that it is something totally new. Everything started at the end of the World War I when Harlem become a cultural centre of black musicians, intellectuals, writers and artists. This movement helped to break down barriers between the two races and it actively fought against racism.<sup>4</sup>

“The Harlem Renaissance transformed African-American identity and history, but it also transformed American culture in general. Never before had so many Americans read the thoughts of African-Americans and embraced the African-American community’s

3 Great migration. History [online]. 2012 [cit. 2015-03-16]. Available at: <http://www.history.com/topics/black-history/great-migration>

4 ANDREWS, William L. Classic fiction of the Harlem Renaissance. New York: Oxford University Press, 1994, 403 p. ISBN 01-950-8196-X.

productions, expressions, and style.”<sup>5</sup> The Harlem Renaissance movement produced a number of novels, magazines, newspapers, songs and art. Literal community was promoted mostly thanks to the local newspaper and magazines e.g. *The Messenger* or *Crisis* <sup>6</sup>, which published the Afro-American works and writings. The authors usually promoted the Afro-American heritage, history and traditions. Most important authors include Langston Hughes, Charles W. Chestnutt, John Weldon Johnson or Jessie Redmon Fauset. This movement was not only about literature. Another product of the Harlem Renaissance was for example jazz, the style of music which broke down all conventions. Famous jazz singers were for example Billie Holiday, Ella Fitzgerald or Bessie Smith. Also theatre and visual arts were very popular.<sup>7</sup>

For black people, this period meant a huge change and progress. They improved their lives and living conditions. Their culture blossomed.<sup>8</sup> This movement enabled the Afro-American people to gain the right to speak, to express and to represent themselves. Freedom was very important and valuable for them and it was also the reason why they migrated to America. “Freedom, too, the long-sought, we still seek,—the freedom of life and limb, the freedom to work and think, the freedom to love and aspire.”<sup>9</sup> They wanted to become a part of the community and to spread a positive outlook on the Afro-American culture and to promote it. Through art, music and literature, they fought against inequality and racism in the United States.

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5 HAUBOLD, Kathrin. Nella Larsen - African-American Artist of the Harlem Renaissance. München: GRIN Verlag GmbH, 2011. ISBN 978-364-0856-336.

6 Harlem Renaissance: American literature and art. HUTCHINSON, George. Encyclopaedia Britannica [online]. 2015 [cit. 2015-03-16]. Available at: <http://www.britannica.com/EBchecked/topic/255397/Harlem-Renaissance>

7 ANDREWS, William L. Classic fiction of the Harlem Renaissance. New York: Oxford University Press, 1994, 403 p. ISBN 01-950-8196-X.

8 HUGGINS, Nathan Irvin. Harlem Renaissance. Updated ed. New York: Oxford University Press, 2007, xxxiii, 343 p., [16] p. of plates. ISBN 01-950-6336-8.

9 BOIS, W.E.B. Du and Norman HARRIS. The souls of black folk. New ed. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2008, xxxii, 192 p. ISBN 978-019-9555-833.

## 1.2 Development

Everything started at the beginning of the 20<sup>th</sup> century after the World War I with the Great migration. The Great Migration was a huge movement of Afro-American people, who moved from the cities in the agrarian South like Alabama, Mississippi or Louisiana to the urban North. These migrations had usually economic reasons but there was also a big motivation to escape from the oppression in the South. Most of the people here were farmers and only a few of them owned some land. After the World War I, they took a chance and decided to move from the South. Many companies were so desperate for workers that they even paid the travel expenses. The population of black people in the South dramatically decreased. These people settled in the New York City, but also in other cities like Detroit, Chicago, Philadelphia or Washington. They wanted to find a job, a new place to live, to educate themselves and they also hoped to settle down and to find a new life. It took some time and, unfortunately, they usually had to face very poor working conditions, discrimination and the fact that they had no place to live. Finally, all those people settled down and they created a true urban community. They were interconnected because they shared the same history and common experiences and their culture had gradually become very popular.<sup>10</sup>

Despite the American democratic system, the white inhabitants did not welcome the Afro-American people with open arms. They were full of prejudices and racism. The cities that had been formerly all white. Now, it was full of black people. A black culture started to spread everywhere, in newspapers, businesses or churches. Educated black people were able to find some work but workers usually suffered from discrimination. White workers were afraid of losing their job and they were complaining about lowering their wages. Afro-Americans were usually segregated in specific parts of the cities, which were called slums or ghettos. Due to the large numbers of migrants, these slums were very crowded and the standards of living here were very low.<sup>11</sup>

The life of Afro-Americans was not easy in the North but they still praised their culture and traditions. Their lifestyle and culture gradually become very popular. It

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10 The Harlem Renaissance. In: U.S.History [online]. 2014 [cit. 2015-01-29]. Available at: <http://www.ushistory.org/us/46e.asp>

11 WINTZ, Cary D. The Harlem Renaissance, 1920-1940. New York: Garland Pub., 1996, 7 v. ISBN 08153221867-.

represented something completely different and unique. Afro-Americans brought their traditions, rituals, art, music and the whole lifestyle. It was something new, it had developed in completely different world in isolation. It was all based around the city of Harlem, the biggest slum full of Afro-American people. They presented their history and traditions through art, music and literature. This flowering of the Afro-American culture is called Harlem Renaissance and it deeply influenced and affected American world in future decades.<sup>12</sup>

### 1.3 The city of Harlem

Despite the fact, that the Harlem Renaissance movement was not connected only with the city of Harlem but also other locations like New Orleans, Los Angeles, Chicago, Memphis or the New York City, the city of Harlem gave a name to this movement. The city of Harlem is a large neighbourhood in New York City in Manhattan. It was founded in 1658 by a Dutch governor Peter Stuyvesant. For many years it has been a centre of African-American culture. At the end of the World War I, many African-American people moved to Harlem during the Great Migration. They settled here and formed an urban community with its own culture and a street life. Many of these people were interested in art, theatre, music or literature. Harlem become a place, where black people, intellectuals and artists gathered, a place where they could discuss, freely express and develop themselves.<sup>13</sup>

There were many reasons why the city of Harlem become a centre of the Afro-American people. During the Harlem Renaissance, many organizations were created and their aim was to support Afro-American culture. At the beginning of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, *National Association for the Advancement of Coloured People* was established in the New York City. This organization should secure educational, political and economic equality for coloured people. It fought against racial discrimination. That was one reason why black people came to the New York City or Harlem particularly. Others followed their friends who were successful here or the intellectuals, whom they believed like W.E.B. Du Bois. Many of the black people wanted simply to find a better life and a paid job. They wanted to secure their

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12 Harlem Renaissance: American literature and art. HUTCHINSON, George. Encyclopaedia Britannica [online]. 2015 [cit. 2015-03-16]. Available at: <http://www.britannica.com/EBchecked/topic/255397/Harlem-Renaissance>

13 HUGGINS, Nathan Irvin. Harlem Renaissance. Updated ed. New York: Oxford University Press, 2007, xxxiii, 343 p., [16] p. of plates. ISBN 01-950-6336-8.

families.<sup>14</sup>

The city of Harlem was full of places, where the artists met, talked or listened to music. One example is the *Apollo Theater*, a place where talented people had the opportunity to perform. Another place was called *The Savoy*, a famous ballroom where people enjoyed dancing. People also organized parties in their homes or small gatherings which gave them a chance to meet new soul-mates with the same ideas and opinions, and enabled them to express freely their thoughts about art, politics or literature.<sup>15</sup>

## 1.4 Harlem Renaissance in literature

Not only music, art and theatre were developed during the Harlem Renaissance but also the literature. Nowadays, the Afro-American literature is an integral part of the American literature. It is taught at schools and universities and it is well-known all over the world. The Harlem was full of intellectuals and talented people during the Harlem Renaissance period. Those authors paved the way and served as an inspiration for contemporary authors such as Toni Morrison or Richard Wright. Afro-American people declared their freedom to express themselves and to celebrate their heritage, history and culture. An important shift started when major publishers and magazines or newspapers of that time begun to publish black writers' works. Afro-Americans wanted to demonstrate that they are members of the society and they also have the right to freely express their ideas. Those works attracted not only black readers but the whole America become fascinated by a portrayal of black life. Afro-American literature had slowly penetrated into the American mainstream culture at it became a part of it. It was seen as something different and exotic.

The *Black is Beautiful movement* also helped to change the idea that black people are less attractive than white people. This movement was created in 1960s and it was promoted by Steve Biko in his book *Black Consciousness Movement*.<sup>16</sup> This movement encouraged black people (and especially women) to stop lightening their skin or straightening their hair. This movement pointed out that black and white people are equally attractive and they are

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14 Harlem Renaissance: American literature and art. In: Encyclopaedia Britannica: New York [online]. 2014 [cit. 2015-02-05]. Available at: <http://www.britannica.com/EBchecked/topic/255397/Harlem-Renaissance>

15 HUGGINS, Nathan Irvin. Harlem Renaissance. Updated ed. New York: Oxford University Press, 2007, xxxiii, 343 p., [16] p. of plates. ISBN 01-950-6336-8.

16 Little Known Black History Fact: Black is Beautiful. TAYLOR, Erica. Black america web [online]. 2013 [cit. 2015-03-16]. Available at: <http://blackamericaweb.com/2013/11/26/little-known-black-history-fact-black-is-beautiful/>

equal human beings.

One of the most prominent authors of this period was a writer and a poet Langston Hughes who published *The Book of American Negro Poetry*. Women writers are represented by Zora Neale Hurston, whose work was rediscovered many years after her death by Alice Walker. This writer inspired many generations of Afro-American women writers. These two authors had a really big influence but there were many other authors who became well-known all over the world. Important names include for example Jean Toomer, Jessie Fauset, Alain Locke, James Weldon Johnson, Dorothy West or Wallace Thurman.<sup>17</sup>

## 1.5 Characteristics and themes

In general, the Afro-American literature is usually focused on the lives of black people. It includes topics such as the life of black people in the American society, Afro-American culture, history, traditions, slavery, religion or freedom.<sup>18</sup> According to Kathrin Haubold, the Harlem Renaissance era was a period of outstanding literary creativity.<sup>19</sup> During the Harlem Renaissance the Afro-American literature gained new attention. Many of the Afro-American people and their families had experienced slavery and the times of oppression, segregation and Jim Crow Laws. These Laws segregated black people in all facilities in the South and represented a form of racism against all black people. They were perceived as inferior beings. The segregation was supported by many official institutions like public schools, transportation, restaurants and almost all public places.<sup>20</sup> They migrated from the South not only because of work or education but because they saw new opportunities in America. They wanted to escape from this system. All things that they went through during their lives are reflected in their work. Afro-American literature was full of conflict regarding either race or black identity. Some of the authors promoted the Afro-American traditions, history and folklore. Afro-American people wanted to be equal and to have a stable and secure position within the society. Heroes of their works are usually individuals struggling to integrate into the American society. “Some common themes represented during the Harlem

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17 WALL, Cheryl A. *Women of the Harlem renaissance*. Bloomington: Indiana University Press, c1995, xx, 246 p. *Women of letters* (Bloomington, Ind.). ISBN 02-532-0980-3.

18 HUGGINS, Nathan Irvin. *Harlem Renaissance*. Updated ed. New York: Oxford University Press, 2007, xxxiii, 343 p., [16] p. of plates. ISBN 01-950-6336-8.

19 HAUBOLD, Kathrin. *Nella Larsen - African-American Artist of the Harlem Renaissance*. München: GRIN Verlag GmbH, 2011. ISBN 978-364-0856-336.

20 Jim Crow law. *Encyclopaedia Britannica* [online]. 2015 [cit. 2015-03-16]. Available at: United States [1877-1954]



Renaissance were the influence of slavery, black identity, the effects of institutional racism, the dilemmas of performing and writing for elite white audiences, and how to convey the experience of modern black life in the urban North.<sup>21</sup>

During the Harlem Renaissance there was not only one form of literature typical for this period. The authors were very creative and they published a wide variety of different styles. Much of the Afro-American literature has an oral tradition, but also novels, poems, political works or slave narratives were published. What also influenced the literature of Harlem Renaissance was the music. “Blues and jazz influenced both the content of African-American literature and the style.”<sup>22</sup> Slave narratives were published usually by slaves, who escaped and shared their experience. Political works usually dealt with the Civil Right issues.

## 1.6 A New Black identity

The period of Harlem Renaissance practically changed the view of the whole world on the Afro-American people. Before that, the black people were seen as rural, uneducated, or maybe even primitive. After the Great Migration, when black people moved to America in great numbers, everything changed. It took a long time until they were truly accepted as the American citizens but they had gradually built their own position within the American society. They gained the right to speak and express themselves, they could educate themselves and express freely their ideas. It all happened thanks to many organizations like *National Association for the Advancement of Colored People*<sup>23</sup> which was created in that times, but also newspapers, magazines or business companies. The greatest credit for this, however, had the African Americans themselves. They gradually become equal to Americans, educated and sophisticated. They helped to overcome racial prejudices and they shifted the American democratic system on a completely different level. All this they achieved through hard work, diligence and their talent. They broke down barriers between the two races. Mostly thanks to the Harlem Renaissance we can now appreciate the black life, art and culture.

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21 Boundless. “The Harlem Renaissance.” Boundless Art History. Boundless, 14 Nov. 2014. Retrieved 28 Jan. 2015. Available at: <https://www.boundless.com/art-history/textbooks/boundless-art-history-textbook/europe-and-america-1900-1950-36/america-1930-1945-228/the-harlem-renaissance-809-10846/>

22 African American literature. In: ANDREWS, William. Encyclopedia Britannica [online]. 2014 [cit. 2015-01-29]. Available at: <http://www.britannica.com/EBchecked/topic/926640/African-American-literature/232357/Novelists>

23 NAACP Victories. National Association for the Advancement of Colored People [online]. 2009, 2015 [cit. 2015-03-17]. Available at: <http://www.naacp.org/>

## 1.7 Criticism of the movement

During a relatively short period of time, this movement provoked a number of not only literary debates and argues. The statement: “..if nothing else, the Harlem Renaissance was productive of controversy” is an absolute truth.<sup>24</sup> Still today, more than eighty years later, it is discussed how this movement affected the lives of the Afro-American people. People are still arguing when this movement did begin and when did it end, what and whether it was a positive or negative development of the Afro-American culture. However, it can't be argued that the Harlem Renaissance was one of the most significant development of Afro-American history.

The critics of the Harlem Renaissance usually deal with the significance of the movement as a whole, not with the individual works. This criticism is usually focused on its political and racial impacts.<sup>25</sup> The critics also usually highlight that this movement was mostly connected to the middle class black people and it expresses only their ideas and opinions. For example, Cary D. Wintz, a professor of history focuses in his series *Harlem Renaissance* on the Afro- American literature and he characterizes this period as “a literary and intellectual movement” as well as “an attitude or a state of mind”.<sup>26</sup>

Some of the critics, like Jeffrey B. Ferguson, also disputes that the main objective was to create a new identity. “They say that the Harlem Renaissance, in its attempt to create a separate, distinct culture fully comprised of African American ideals, could not escape from the historical and foundational elements of White, European culture imposed upon blacks throughout their history in the U.S.”<sup>27</sup>

I think, that the significance of this movement can't be doubted. A large number of young writers, who emerged from the Harlem renaissance made a stable and lasting place within the American literary history.<sup>28</sup> It was not only literal and artistic movement but it was

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24 KENNEDY, George Alexander. *The Cambridge history of literary criticism*. New York: Cambridge University Press, 1989-2013, 9 v. ISBN 05213001429.

25 KENNEDY, George Alexander. *The Cambridge history of literary criticism*. New York: Cambridge University Press, 1989-2013, 9 v. ISBN 05213001429.

26 WINTZ, Cary D. *The Harlem Renaissance, 1920-1940*. New York: Garland Pub., 1996, 7 v. ISBN 08153221867-.

27 *The Harlem Renaissance*. In: HubPages [online]. 2011 [cit. 2015-02-05]. Available at: <http://mr-gadget.hubpages.com/hub/The-Harlem-Renaissance>

28 ANDREWS, William L. *Classic fiction of the Harlem Renaissance*. New York: Oxford University Press, 1994, 403 p. ISBN 01-950-8196-X.

also a social movement. It contributed to a new black social status in America, it influenced the Civil Rights Movement and it represented the black population in the United States of America.

## **2 WOMEN WRITERS OF THE HARLEM RENAISSANCE**

During the period of the Harlem Renaissance, most of the writers were men. It was quite rare for Afro-American woman to publish a book but it can't be denied that the Afro-American women writers were important part of the Harlem Renaissance literature. They supported this movement, they were successful editors, publishers and also organizers. They wanted to honestly and truthfully depict the lives and problems of the black people, especially black women. In their works, they described the difficulties connected to gender relations and race problems. These stories are attractive for the readers because they are really authentic and they show the situations as it really happened.

Woman writers of the Harlem Renaissance include famous names such as Jessie Redmon Fauset, Helene Johnson, Dorothy West, Angelina Weld Grimké, Gwendolyn Bennett, Marita Bonner, Georgia Douglas Johnson and of course Nella Larsen and Zora Neale Hurston. "Their writings provide prophetic insights as to the sociocultural impulses and political beliefs affecting the turn of events in the black community from 1923 to 1933. Drawing from their own backgrounds, observations and experiences, these women crystallize in words the complexity of black life during the years in question."<sup>29</sup>

### **2.1 ZORA NEALE HURSTON**

#### **2.1.1 Personal life**

Zora Neale Hurston was one of the most important Afro-American writers of the Harlem Renaissance from the beginning of the twentieth century. She was a very talented person. She was not only a novelist but also an anthropologist, folklorist, short story writer and essayist. "Zora Neale Hurston's pioneering efforts in the fields of folklore and anthropology stand out even more clearly when seen in light of the fact that, save for Native American populations, there was no scientific focus on other ethnic minority groups before the 1900s."<sup>30</sup>

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29 WALL, Cheryl A. Women of the Harlem renaissance. Bloomington: Indiana University Press, c1995, xx, 246 p. Women of letters (Bloomington, Ind.). ISBN 02-532-0980-3.

30 PLANT, Deborah G. Zora Neale Hurston: a biography of the spirit. Lanham, MD: Rowman, 2011. ISBN 978-144-2206-120.

Zora Neale Hurston was born in Alabama on January 7, 1891 but she grew up in Eatonville, Florida. She spent most of her childhood at home with her mother and seven more siblings. It was her mother who had the biggest influence on Zora's life. Her father was a busy person. He was a Baptist minister and he also served as a mayor of Eatonville so he was not at home very often. Unfortunately, when Zora was thirteen years old, her mother died, her father remarried and the family was separated. The children lived with different relatives and Zora was sent to school.<sup>31</sup>

These times were difficult for her, she worked in a series of jobs, she also joined a traveling theatrical company but finally she ended up in New York City during the Harlem renaissance period. She began to attend a Howard University and after several years she managed to get a university degree. Zora was very interested in folklore and Afro-American traditions. She spent some years collecting folklore and short stories, she was interested in songs, tales, dances and sayings. She became famous in the late 1920s when her writing career really started. "The black child who in Eatonville had begged for rides and followed turpentine workers down the road had travelled a considerable distance. She was now a New Negro, a part of the cultural movement illustrating the genius in black souls".<sup>32</sup> She was very famous during her lifetime, but the biggest success came after her death, posthumously.

Zora was very fond of her roots, she portrayed her experiences and the moments from her life into her novels. Also her hometown Eatonville was very often mentioned in her books as a place of independence, proud and happiness. She was very witty, charming and impressive person with a very good reputation. She was married several times, her first husband was her classmate and musician, the second was much younger than Zora and the marriage did not last long. At the end of her life, during the 1950s she returned to Florida where she also died on January 28, 1960.<sup>33</sup>

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31 HEMENWAY, Robert E. a With a foreword by Alice WALKER. Zora Neale Hurston: a literary biography. Illini books ed. Urbana [Ill.]: University of Illinois Press, 1980. ISBN 978-0252008078.

32 HEMENWAY, Robert E. a With a foreword by Alice WALKER. Zora Neale Hurston: a literary biography. Illini books ed. Urbana [Ill.]: University of Illinois Press, 1980. ISBN 978-0252008078.

33 KING, Lovalerie. The Cambridge introduction to Zora Neale Hurston. New York: Cambridge University Press, 2008, xiii, 137 p. ISBN 978-052-1670-951.

### 2.1.2 Literary career and works of Zora Neale Hurston

Zora Neale Hurston has a very creative and independent spirit. Despite the fact she was criticized, often by her own friends, she became one of the most famous and successful black women writers of her era. During her life, she published seven books. Her most famous book is *Their Eyes Were Watching God*, but she also wrote other novels and short stories.

During her studies she wrote only several short stories that were published in magazines, but her literary career truly started during the 1930s to early 1940s. At those times, Zora was one of the most important figures of the black cultural and literary movement. She was criticized by many authors from this period but she was very popular among readers. She carried and celebrated typical Afro-American traditions, values and voices. She was able to use her own experience and the knowledge of the Afro-American life and traditions in her novels and she also expressed herself in the authentic language. She used Afro-American expression and real Afro-American dialects in her novels. “Hurston’s characters are early casts of ‘the folk’, rural people who speak in the black vernacular and repair to the natural world and the spiritual world to explain and influence the lives they live.”<sup>34</sup>

Zora Neale Hurston’s career spanned for almost 30 years. During her life she published four novels, two books about folklore, many short stories, essays, plays and articles. Her first novel is *Jonah's Gourd Vine*. During early 1940s, she wrote her masterpiece *Their Eyes Were Watching God*. Her other works include her autobiography - *Dust Tracks on a Road*, several anthropological studies, a collection of folktales *Mules and Men*, short story *Sweat*, an essay called *How it Feels to be Colored Me* or a guide *Tell my Horse*, where she describes a culture in Jamaica and Haiti. She lived in this area for a while so she used her own experiences. In most of her books she had incorporated some autobiographical elements. She was also an open-minded person. She was interested in folklore, anthropology, religion or woo-doo. Her characters were full of life and she openly wrote about serious issues. Many of her works were rediscovered and awarded posthumously.<sup>35</sup>

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34 PLANT, Deborah G. *Zora Neale Hurston: a biography of the spirit*. Lanham, MD: Rowman, 2011. ISBN 978-144-2206-120.

35 HEMENWAY, Robert E. a With a foreword by Alice WALKER. *Zora Neale Hurston: a literary biography*. Illini books ed. Urbana [Ill.]: University of Illinois Press, 1980. ISBN 978-0252008078.

Her masterpiece, which I am going to analyse, is *Their Eyes Were Watching God*. This book was published in 1937. The title of the book hints the themes of the novel and its background. It comes from the novel itself, where Zora wrote this: “They seemed to be staring at the dark, but their eyes were watching God.”<sup>36</sup> It symbolizes the idea that everything in life is controlled by God. He has the power to control and influence our lives. It may also mean that no matter what we do or how we act in our lives, our true fate is predetermined.

Despite the fact that she was a successful writer at that time, she was dependent on donations and publishers and she basically struggled with poverty. For her efforts she was appreciated posthumously and today she is considered one of the greatest figures of her time. She became an inspiration for later women writers. “Nearly every black woman writer of significance – including Maya Angelou, Toni Morrison and Alice Walker – acknowledges Zora Neale Hurston as her literary foremother.”<sup>37</sup>

## **2.2 NELLA LARSEN**

### **2.2.1 Personal life**

Nella Larsen was born under the name Nellie Walker in April 13, 1891 in Chicago. Together with her contemporary Zora Neale Hurston she is considered to be one of the most important writers of the Harlem Renaissance. Despite the fact that she did not publish as many books as Zora Neale Hurston did, she received many awards for her writing.

Nella was born to a Danish mother and West-Indian colored father. When she was a young girl, her father left them and her mother married a white man. They had another daughter together and the result was that Nella was a black child in a white family. She started to attend an Afro-American university in Tennessee. She studied nursing, and after her graduation, she became a head nurse in a hospital in Alabama. Later on, she came back to the New York City as a nurse but for a while she also worked as a librarian. She married a well-known physicist Elmer Samuel Imes. Soon after her marriage in 1920, her literary and

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36 HURSTON, Zora Neale a Introduced by Zadie SMITH. *Their eyes were watching God*. Repr. London: Virago, 2007. ISBN 978-086-0685-241.

37 PLANT, Deborah G. *Zora Neale Hurston: a biography of the spirit*. Lanham, MD: Rowman, 2011. ISBN 978-144-2206-120.

writing career started and she became an active part of Harlem literary and art movement and community.

Unfortunately, her personal life was not as successful as her literary career. Her marriage was full of problems. During the year 1933, she went through scandalous divorce with her husband. After that, she did not write a word. She started to work in a hospital in Brooklyn as a nurse and until the end of her life she lived alone. She died in her apartment in Brooklyn in 1964.<sup>38</sup>

### 2.2.2 Literary career and works of Nella Larsen

Nella Larsen worked as a nurse but also as a librarian therefore she had a close relationship to books. During her lifetime she published two novels - *Quicksand* and *Passing* and both of them were very successful. Both of these novels deals with the topics of racial discrimination, restrictions and gender. The protagonists of her novels are mulatto women stuck between the white and black world – the author put her own experiences into her novels. She published also several short stories and articles; after publishing a short story called *Sanctuary*, Larsen was accused of plagiarism. Finally, she managed to clean her name. She wanted to write her third novel but she never did and she returned to her nursing career. Her novels gained recognition many years ago but they are also still popular among scholars nowadays.

Nella worked hard during her life, she was an ambitious and a strong woman. “She impressed her friends and associates with her desire for serious literary recognition, her focus and hard work, and her determination to disclose hard truths about the dilemmas of middle-class women of color, regardless of what was fashionable in either black or white circles.”<sup>39</sup>

Nella Larsen’s first novel *Quicksand*, which was published in 1927, was a huge success and it is partly her autobiography. This novel was awarded by Harmon Foundation Prize.<sup>40</sup> Her second and also the last novel *Passing* was also received great critical acclaim.

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38 HAUBOLD, Kathrin. Nella Larsen - African-American Artist of the Harlem Renaissance. München: GRIN Verlag GmbH, 2011. ISBN 978-364-0856-336.

39 ANDREWS, William L. Classic fiction of the Harlem Renaissance. New York: Oxford University Press, 1994, 403 p. ISBN 01-950-8196-X.

40 PLANT, Deborah G. Zora Neale Hurston: a biography of the spirit. Lanham, MD: Rowman, 2011. ISBN 978-144-2206-120.



Nella Larsen was also the first Afro-American woman to receive the Guggenheim Fellowship for literature. After that, she travelled to Europe. She worked on her third novel, which was, unfortunately, never published. She faced some problems in her personal life, she got divorced and she completely left the literary circles at the end of the 1930s.

In this part of my diploma thesis, I dealt mostly with the theory and important facts about the Harlem Renaissance movement. I provided several definitions and different views on the period of the Harlem Renaissance. I introduced two important women writers of this period and described their lives, importance and their literary careers.

# PRACTICAL PART

The second part of my diploma thesis is more practical. I will analyse two books of the prominent Afro-American authors – Zora Neale Hurston and Nella Larsen. I am not going to describe the theory, but I would like to work with the language of the novels, the symbols, metaphors, the figurative language and the main themes. The aim of this part is to do the analysis of the novels written by Afro-American women writers.

## 1 INTRODUCTION

At the beginning I would like to summarize the main plots of the books. I would like to describe the plot of the novels and to briefly explain it for the readers of my thesis. Then I will analyse the main characters and the important topics of the books. I would also like to compare these two novels and to describe what is similar and what is different about them. In detail I want to analyse the language, the setting and the structure of both novels and their characters. At the end of this practical part, I would like to show how these novels can be used when teaching English language, what are the target students and suitable discussion themes, activities and questions.

### 1.1 Research questions

During the analysis of the novels, I would like to find the answers and investigate several research questions. I would like to start with the titles of the books. Both of the titles suggest the content of the book and it can even symbolize something. The title of the book is very important and it usually tries to capture the main themes of the book. The title should be as attractive, that it will attract reader's attention and imagination and it will force them to read the book. I will also investigate, how the books are structured and who is the narrator.<sup>41</sup>

The language of the novel is also important. The books were written during the same period. But still, almost ten years are between them. Both of the authors were Afro-American women, so maybe we can find some similarities. Is the language used in *Quicksand* similar as in *Their Eyes Were Watching God*? Are there some metaphors? This is what I would like to

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41 The truth about choosing book titles. Scott Berkun [online]. 2014 [cit. 2015-03-17]. Available at: <http://scottberkun.com/2012/the-truth-about-picking-book-titles/>

investigate in the analysis.

Other aspects that I would like to analyse, are the settings of the novels. I would like to compare the main themes and the main character and to analyse if Janie Crawford from *Their Eyes Were Watching God* is somehow similar to Helga Crane from *Quicksand* and if those women finally are able to find true love and happiness.

## **2 ANALYSIS OF THE BOOK *THEIR EYES WERE WATCHING GOD* BY ZORA NEALE HURSTON**

### **2.1 Plot Overview**

The whole book is a story of a young black woman Janie Crawford, her life, search for love and complicated relationships with men. Janie is also a narrator of this novel. Her story starts when she is young girl and she is raised by her grandmother called Nanny. Janie is a curious girl, who yearns to discover the world but the main interest of her grandmother is to marry Janie as soon as possible. Because Nanny lived her life mostly as a slave, repressed by white people, she wants to provide a home for Janie and she wants to find a man who is able to secure her.

Nanny's wishes are fulfilled before her death. Janie's first husband is a much older black man Logan Killicks, not really nice farmer but he has got enough money and land to be considered a good catch. Janie does not love him at all although she tries to, but this is not a marriage as she had imagined it. Logan wants Janie to work hard on their farm and does not care about her much. One day, when her husband leave the farm, a well-dressed and good-looking man comes along and he is very interested in Janie. His name is Joe Starks. They go out together for a few weeks and when Joe offers her to run away with him, she does not hesitate for long. Janie and Joe marry and they move to Eatonville - the first black city in the United States - where the ambitious Joe Starks becomes a big voice. He has got enough money to buy land and to cultivate the city and the people here elect him to become a mayor of Eatonville. Janie starts to live a monotonous life as Joe's wife and she works in their shop. She is economically secured, lives a luxurious life, she has nice dresses but she is not happy at all. After some years, their relationship changes, they do not have children and it looks like the only things that Janie ever wanted – love, attention and respect, will she never get from Joe. They argue with each other, Joe beats Janie and, after almost twenty years, their marriage breaks down. Joe become ill and finally he dies.

After the Joe's death, Janie still works in the shop and one day a young handsome man starts hanging around Janie. He is called Tea Cake and despite the fact he is twelve years younger than Janie, he attracts her very much and finally she falls in love with him. She likes

his careless attitude, his spontaneous behaviour and independence. She starts dating Tea Cake. But the people in the town do not approve it. They think that Tea Cake wants only to fool Janie's head and steal all her money that she inherited from her late husband. Janie does not care about this gossip and she runs away from Eatonville with Tea Cake.

Janie and Tea Cake marry and move to Jacksonville and later on to Everglades to work there. They work together during the harvest season, they pick up sugar cane and beans. When the season is off, they just enjoy the life and socialize with friends because Tea Cake is a very popular and sociable person. This life is what Janie wanted all time and she is really happy with Tea Cake. They have a lot of fun and they are honest to each other. Those happy times last until a hurricane comes to Everglades. Despite all the warnings, Janie and Tea Cake decide to stay in their house with a couple of friends. Unfortunately, the hurricane destroys the city and when they want to escape, Tea Cake is bitten by a rabid dog. After few weeks, he falls ill and goes crazy. It is too late for him to be cured and while he attacks Janie, she is forced to shoot him to save her life. Janie is emotionally broken and very sad that she loses her beloved husband. After a trial, where she is freed, she arranges him a funeral.

At the end of the book Janie comes back to Eatonville after eighteen months, broken-hearted but on the other hand she is happy that she found out what a real love is. She retells the whole experience to her only good friend, Phoeby. The story of her life is complete at the end of the book.

## **2.2 Setting**

The storyline of the entire book takes place at the American south in Florida during the early twentieth century. There are basically two settings mentioned in the book, where Janie lives and which are put against each other as a big contrast. The first one is Eatonville, where the author of the book spent her childhood and she featured this city in many of her stories. Eatonville was the first all-black city in the United States which was incorporated in the year 1887.<sup>42</sup> In the book Janie lives in Eatonville with Joe Sparks as a mayor's wife. The life she lives here is a little monotonous, unfulfilled, boring and isolated. She is inferior to her

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42 LARSEN, Nella a Thadious M. DAVIS. Quicksand. New York: Penguin Books, 2002, xxxvii, 154 p. ISBN 01-411-8127-3.

husband, she has to work in the shop, silent, with her hair tied up.

The second city, where Janie lives with Tea Cake is Everglades. This place is in the rural part of Florida and Janie is really happy there. She works together with Tea Cake, they have fun, they are dancing; and singing, and this city represents the freedom, innocence, happiness, nature and love. It also represents the climax of the novel because of the occurring hurricane. At the end of the book, Janie came back to Eatonville and the story of her life ends.

### **2.3 Analysis of the main characters**

The main character of the book is Janie Crawford and the whole novel is about her life. At the beginning of the novel, she is nearly sixteen-year-old girl and at the end she grows up to be a woman in her forties. During her life, she goes through several changes. “In *Their Eyes Were Watching God*, the protagonist Janie Mae Crawford experiences her personal empowerment to the extent that she can speak for herself.”<sup>43</sup> Janie is Afro-American girl with a white ancestry. When she is young, she is brought up by her grandmother Nanny. Janie is very romantic, curious and she dreams about a big love. This romantic nature of hers makes her a target for men of all kind.

Janie is a very independent person. She does not care what other people think about her. As we can see it in the book – Janie does not care about the opinions of the people from the village. She does not care about the porch sitters, who are still gossiping. For example, very soon after the death of Jody, she finds herself a new man, Tea Cake. By this, she becomes the main target of slander from the local villagers but she does not care and she is determined to find happiness and love.

Her character develops throughout the story. At the beginning of the book she is a naïve girl, she dreams all the time and does not care about the real life and work. The first big disappointment she experiences on a farm where she lives with Logan Killicks. Her romantic visions are almost ruined. She works every day and the life with Logan is not

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43 KING, Lovalerie. *The Cambridge introduction to Zora Neale Hurston*. New York: Cambridge University Press, 2008, xiii, 137 p. ISBN 978-052-1670-951.

romantic at all. He is too old for a young woman like Janie and the only things that he expects from her are a warm dinner and an ancillary workforce. She is still waiting for her prince on a white horse and one day he really comes. When Joe Starks appears on the farm one day, asking for cold water, it really looks like a miracle. Janie's romantic spirit awakens again.

Throughout the novel, Janie finds out that with marriage the love necessarily does not have to come. For a half of her life, she is inferior to men, her husbands, and she suppresses her individualism and freedom, especially with Joe Starks. Joe is a very strong personality and so is Janie. He is a mayor of Eatonville and he only expects from Janie to stand by his side, to wear a nice dress, and to smile and look beautiful. Nice example in the book is, when the people asks her to give a speech during the ceremony in Eatonville. She is pleasantly surprised that the people are interested in her opinion but Joe silences her before she even starts. Joe needs an obedient women without an opinion which certainly is not Janie. Their strong personalities clashes very often.

It happens at the end of the book that, despite the fact Janie is devastated because of a Tea Cake's death, she finally finds her voice and becomes a strong, experienced and independent woman and she is grateful for what she went through. This is kind of a happy ending for Janie. It took many years and much effort, until she truly managed to find her place in the world. Zora Neale Hurston put many autobiographical elements into the character of Janie, also her love and relationship with Tea Cake is based on her real experience.

Another important character, which, however, appears only at the beginning of the book, is Janie's grandmother, Nanny Crawford. Nanny grew up in a slavery and her biggest wish is to secure a nice life for her niece. She believes in typical stereotypes about marriage and financial security and she forces Janie to marry Logan Kilicks. Because she herself was never married, she wants this for Janie. Nanny wants only the best for Janie but she wants it so much that it results in her blindness towards Janie's needs. Nanny dies very soon but Janie remembers her often. She was an important person in Janie's life and her only family.

Logan Kilicks is Janie's first husband, an older black man, much older than Janie in fact. We know from the book that he is ugly and unpleasant old man. He does not wash his

feet and he has got an asymmetrical face. Nanny wanted Janie to marry Logan because, in her opinion, he is a good catch. He possesses some land and a house. He does not love Janie, he just wants a wife who will cook a dinner for him and help him to work on the field. He is not romantic at all which is contrasted with Janie's romantic nature. He commands Janie all the time, he is frustrated with her and he is very unpleasant. He wants Janie to work hard and to appreciate him. When Janie threatens him that she will leave, he fears a little, but he does not trust her.

The second Janie's husband, Joe Starks, is a very proud, wealthy and ambitious man. He is a strong and powerful character in the novel. Because of his money, his personality and his hard work, he is able to turn the city of Eatonville into a nice, modern and developed place. He has got an entrepreneurial spirit. Jody wants to control everybody, including Janie. Which clashes with her independent nature. Comparing to Logan, he is much more evil character. He is aggressive, he insults Janie, beats her, criticizes her and wants her to be silent and obedient. He thinks about Janie like his possession. According to him, she has no intelligence, autonomy or even a voice. At first, their relationships develops in a good way, but later on, it shows that Joe Starks is not the right man for Janie. When he is dying, Janie speaks out and tells him about all his crimes. She wants reconcile with him at the end of his life and shows her generosity, but he only confirms his nature and curses Janie.

Tea Cake is Janie's third husband and the first man in her life that she really loves. He is much younger than Janie and he is very open-minded, sociable, sincere and careless person. Despite the fact that he is much younger than Janie, I think that mentally they are absolutely equal. He is determined to enjoy each single day of his life, he likes dancing, singing and having fun. He is very popular among the people. He does not command Janie, he teaches her how to play checkers, and he is truly interested in her – he likes to listen to her stories. He offers her to work with him on the muck. Tea Cake's only weak point is that he has a passion for gambling. At the end of the book he tragically dies in order to save Janie's life. In contrast with Joe, Tea Cake at the end of his life really shows his love to Janie, he is willing to sacrifice himself in order to save her life.

Another important characters in the novel, who do not act individually but as a group, are the porch sitters. They are the people from Eatonville who sit on the porches most of the time and they are gossiping and judging other people. They know everything about



everybody. Their favourite topic is Janie and her younger lover Tea Cake.

The only woman in the book that Janie can rely on is Pheoby Watson, Janie's best friend. She defends Janie against the gossips in the town. Janie trusts her and the whole book is Janie's narration to Phoeby. Thanks to Phoeby, we can see Janie also in a positive light and we can see her good qualities.

## **2.4 Themes of the book**

One of the most important topics of the book is love. Janie experiences many kinds of love throughout her life. There are many different relationships in the book. Janie has got her own vision of true love connected with equality between the lovers, openness and understanding. For Janie, love is very important part of her life. Without love, her life is not full. She is a very romantic person and she does not connect true love with a material security as her Nanny did. Her first husband Logan was not a romantic person, he did not really love Janie, and he just needed a woman to help him on his farm. With Jody, Janie's second husband, there was something. At least at the beginning, Janie was in love with him. But later on, she understood how possessive Jody really was. When she finally experienced true love with Tea Cake at the end of the book she felt happy, complete and alive.

Another important topic of the book is the gender and the roles of men and women. There are traditional gender stereotypes present in the novel. A typical role of a woman is to be an obedient wife, to stay at home, to be weak, passive and submissive. Women can gain power only through marriage to powerful or ambitious men. Man has the right and power to silence woman and to limit her. Man is expected to be dominant, intelligent and ambitious. In the book, all of Janie's husbands were trying to change her in order to fit their own image. Janie did not share their views on traditional gender roles. At the end, she is really successful and she goes through the conventions. Only with Tea Cake, she was able to be herself.

Race and racism is not the central theme of the book but still we can find some references. Mostly, the novel has a positive outlook on a black community. It shows how the black people enjoy their freedom, how they enjoy having fun and funny aspects of life like jokes, games, storytelling and love. Also Janie's unusual fair-skinned appearance is described in a positive way. Black characters in the book are mostly positive, humorous and more

interesting comparing to the white ones. An example of racist problem in the book is the character of Mrs Turner, a black woman who does not like other black people, especially Tea Cake. She tries to separate him from Janie, however, she is not successful.

Another topic, which is developed in the novel is a topic of power and independence. Many characters in the book have got their own ways and ideas how to gain the power. Nanny's idea is to marry a wealthy man to be financially secured. Ambitious Joe Starks become a mayor of Eatonville and he has the power to control other people through money. Janie, on the other hand, finds her fulfilment not in possessions, but in independence, nature, love and relationships with others.

During the novel a lot of people dies. At first we witness the death of Joe and Nanny. Then there is the hurricane when many people dies or they are at least wounded and finally, when it looks like happy ending, also Tea Cake dies. It makes us think about the topic of mortality. We can see it also positively. We know that when something ends, something new is about to start. Janie is also trying to be positive, but the death of Tea Cake is a reason to grief. People, who have lived a good and full life, have no reason to be afraid of death on contrary with people whose conscience is not so pure.

Another topic we can find in the novel is the topic of jealousy. Jealousy is a bad trait, which occurs in most relationships of the book. It mainly concerns men but women are also affected. Many people are jealous on Janie through the novel. Her husband Joe does not want her, to talk with other men. He wants her to tie her hair up and to dress properly. In this part of the novel it is Janie, who is the object of jealousy. Everything changes after Joe's death. It is Janie, who is jealous on Tea Cake because he is much younger and other girls adore him. In this case the jealous behavior is evidence of a big love of Janie to Tea Cake.

The last thing, I would like to mention, is the tradition of folklore in the novel. We know that Zora Neale Hurston was interested in folklore very much and it is also reflected in this novel. She was mainly focused on the description of the nature and she also celebrates the rural black culture. Janie, as a main character, wants to live in harmony with a nature and very often she only lies on the ground and she is observing the sky. It think that she is trying to find her own place in the world and understands who she really is. The nature is depicted as something mystical in the novel and God is represented by the sun.

## 3 ANALYSIS OF THE BOOK *QUICKSAND* BY NELLA LARSEN

### 3.1 Plot Overview

The heroine of this novel is a twenty-two-year-old mulatto teacher Helga Crane which is very closely inspired by the author's own experience and her life. She is a daughter of a white mother and a black father. She teaches at Negro University in Naxos, Georgia. Helga feels unhappy and unsatisfied in this place. Despite the fact she is engaged, she is not close with her fiancé and she also does not have many friends here. She finds this place corrupted, full of racial politics and gossip. The teachers are trying to change children according to some generally accepted standards, their teaching methods are not effective and therefore she decides to leave this school and quit her teaching job.

Helga moves to Chicago, where her uncle lives, but his new wife refuses to have anything to do with her (because of her ethnicity) and sends her away. Helga is very disappointed and moves again to Harlem in the New York City. She is there during the period of Harlem Renaissance, she tries to find a place where she belongs, but she does not feel well neither among the white nor the black people. She stays in the New York City for a while, she finds a job thanks to a rich educated woman Mrs. Hayes Rose and she travels with her. She enjoys it for some time, but after few weeks, she becomes tired of a race-conscious culture, which is in Harlem, and she decides to travel again to her mother's family in Denmark.

In Denmark, Helga is welcomed by her relatives and to her surprise, the people there do not have problem with her race, they treat her as a very beautiful and exotic young woman. She is invited to many parties, she lives a privileged life here, she wears a nice dresses but when she is asked to marry famous white artist, she refuses. She realizes that she is missing black people and she travels back to the New York City. This is expressed in the book: "I simply can't imagine living forever away from colored people."<sup>44</sup>

Helga returns to Harlem, but she is very depressed and feels alone. One day, visiting a church, she finds a new hope and also her future husband Mr. Reverend Green. She

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44 LARSEN, Nella a Thadious M. DAVIS. *Quicksand*. New York: Penguin Books, 2002, xxxvii, 154 p. ISBN 01-411-8127-3.

believes that God will save her. Mr. Green is a preacher, he is not really beautiful, since he is quite fat, but people like him and he is a respectable person. He converts Helga to Christianity and they move together to Alabama where they live in poverty.

I consider the end of this novel really pessimistic. After her whole life, when Helga Crane was desperately trying to find her home, a place where she would feel comfortable and some family or people to care about, she ends up in Alabama, in an unhappy marriage and having frequent pregnancies. During her fourth childbirth she is seriously ill, depressed and when she finds out that she hates her husband, she makes new plans to leave the community. Unfortunately, the ending of the novel is sad. Helga is expecting her fifth child and it looks like she has to stay forever living unhappily in poverty of the community.

### **3.2 Setting**

It is a little bit complicated to describe the setting of this novel because the main character Helga Crane is constantly moving from one place to another. The whole novel begins in Naxos, Georgia. When Helga quits teaching, she moves to Chicago and later on to Harlem in the New York City. She does not stay for long at one place and after being in Harlem, she chooses to visit her relatives in the city of Copenhagen, the capital city of Denmark. From Denmark, she moves back to the New York City and at the end of the novel, Helga lives in Alabama in the South of the United States. In total, we encounter five different destinations in the whole book.

### **3.3 Analysis of the main characters**

The main character of the book is a twenty-three-year-old teacher Helga Crane. She is an educated mulatto woman who was born to a black father and a Danish mother. She is described quite precisely in the book so we can imagine her easily. Helga is very exotic, beautiful and intelligent woman. She has got dark eyes, a pretty mouth and curly blue-black hair. She is a typical woman, she likes shopping and nice things, such as accessories and clothes.<sup>45</sup>

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45 LARSEN, Nella a Thadious M DAVIS. Quicksand. New York: Penguin Books, 2002, xxxvii, 154 p. ISBN 01-411-8127-3.

Helga is beautiful and educated, but very indecisive and impatient person. She is a very impulsive person - her decisions are often impetuous. At the beginning of the book, she is a teacher at Naxos University, a Negro boarding school. She falls in love with Dr. Anderson here, her job is well paid and it is a nice place to live. Nevertheless, Helga is not happy here, she does not identify herself with the methods that are applied there and she decides to quit. She moves out very soon to her hometown Chicago but even there she does not find happiness. Throughout the whole book, Helga searches for her true self. She tries to find her home and a place where she would be happy. She travels from one place to another – from Naxos to Chicago, from Chicago to Harlem and from Harlem to Copenhagen. At the beginning, Helga is always excited at the new place and she likes it, everything is new and unrivalled, but, over time, Helga gets bored and she begins to plan to escape. Finally, at the end of the book, she ends up in Alabama where she lives with a black pastor. She has got many children, yet she is unhappy and depressed.

Helga is trying to find her true self and happiness throughout the novel but she is not really successful. She is constantly unsatisfied with her life, but she is not able to change anything. At first she seems happy and she is enthusiastic about a new place, but suddenly her enthusiasm fades. Her only solution is to move on. She is not able to settle down, to stay at one place, to find a husband and live a happy life. She is moving from one place to another while still searching for something she is not even able to define. After all, her life is quite sad. Despite the fact that she is a victim of racism or sexism, she is her own worst enemy. She never gives herself a chance to be happy. After many years of searching she ends up as a mother of five children with a black pastor she does not even like. She is depressed and broken. She tries to find some friends but she still is and an outsider who does not fully belong there.

One of the first characters mentioned in the book is James Vayle. He is Helga's fiancé and a colleague from Naxos. He is a young black man. He shares the same problems with Helga and they built up a closer relationship together. Because they were both lonely, they decided to get engaged. Their relationship ends as soon as it started. James becomes quite content with his life and work in Naxos and he does not plan to leave. When Helga leaves Naxos, she also leaves James Vayle there.

Another man appearing several times in the novel is Dr Robert Anderson. He is the head of the boarding school in Naxos. He is a very handsome, intelligent and reserved man. Helga falls in love with him and maybe he also shares this love, however, he is not able to express himself. Finally, he proposes and marries Helga's friend Anne, who does Helga live with. Helga is a little jealous about it. This is also maybe the reason why Helga marries Reverend Pleasant Green unexpectedly.

Helga's only close relative is her uncle, Mr Nilssen. He lives in Chicago and he is also the first person Helga wants to visit after leaving Naxos. Helga unfortunately meets only his new wife – Mrs Nilssen. She is a very unpleasant woman and she does not even invite her inside. She wants to break all family ties with Helga because of her race and sends Helga away. That is the time when Helga realizes that she already has no family and no home. Her uncle sends her a letter and some money later in the book, but they never see each other again.

When Helga moves away from Naxos, she finds a job thanks to Mrs Hayes-Rore. This is a rich, prominent black woman, who takes Helga to the New York City. Her husband was a rich man but he died very soon. Mrs Hayes-Rore lives in a fashionable area in Chicago. Helga's job is to help her with her speeches. They have got nice relationship and Mrs Haxes-Rore is really interested in Helga. She is a kind person with a good heart. She introduces Helga to her niece Anne Grey and Helga starts to live with her in her flat. For a while it looks like she found a new home.

Anne Grey is a niece of Mrs. Hayes-Rore. She is very beautiful and wealthy widow. She has got black hair and eyes and a calm face. Helga describes Anne like "to good to be true"<sup>46</sup>. She is interested in a race problem, charity work and she advocates social equality, which is ironic because she lives in a social inequality. They become friends with Helga and they live together for couple of months. At the end of the book Anne marries Dr. Robert Anderson and Helga is a little jealous about it.

Helga has got another relatives - uncle and aunt Poul and Katrina Dahls. However, they live in Copenhagen in Denmark. They like Helga, they behave very nice to her and they invite her to stay at their home. This couple is very friendly and generous to Helga. They are

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46 LARSEN, Nella a Thadious M DAVIS. Quicksand. New York: Penguin Books, 2002, xxxvii, 154 p. ISBN 01-411-8127-3.

very rich, but kind and sociable. They buy her new dresses, introduce her to important people in Copenhagen and they together visit many dinners and parties. They want Helga to stay and live in Copenhagen and to marry a rich man, therefore, they are sad when Helga decides to leave again since they really cared about her.

Axel Olsen is a man whom Helga meets in Copenhagen. He is a typical man from Denmark – very tall with blue eyes, blonde hair and a broad nose. He is a successful artist and he falls in love with Helga. He makes compliments to her all the time. Although he does not express his love publicly (he is rather a reserved man), he likes Helga very much. One day, he surprises Helga and he proposes. He is sure of being accepted but Helga refuses him and leaves Denmark very soon.

At the end of the book, Helga has married Reverend Pleasant Green, a southern preacher. He is very fat, ugly, he does not wash his body and smells. Despite these characteristics, he is an important person and Helga, as his wife, also gain an important social status. He is very religious man and Helga was hoping to find happiness, love and new hope but actually she does not really love him. She lives in poverty, she suffers from frequent pregnancies and depressions. The end of the book is quite pessimistic.

### **3.4 Themes of the book**

Main themes of this novel are race and gender. It deals with the problem, how black people felt during this period. At those times, everybody was judged according to the color of their skin. The Afro-American minority was usually hated and repressed by the white majority. White culture was considered to be something generally respected. Afro-American people had lower wages, they had to work very hard and often they struggled even to survive. Helga was also in a difficult position because she was mixed-raced – her skin was lighter but not white. She did not fit anywhere and that was her problem. For the whole life, she was searching for her identity. Her character developed throughout the novel. “In Helga’s search for herself and her ‘people’, she goes through many different shifts in her identity, specifically her racial identity. The way she feels is often, if not always, a direct reflection of the culture that surrounds her.”<sup>47</sup> During her life, Helga lives in different places and encounter

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47 HAUBOLD, Kathrin. Nella Larsen - African-American Artist of the Harlem Renaissance. München: GRIN Verlag GmbH, 2011. ISBN 978-364-0856-336.

many different people and cultures. She quickly makes decisions and every time she starts to feel unsatisfied, she simply runs away. This search for identity is inspired by Larsen's own life and experiences.

Another topic which is developed in the novel is female sexuality. Afro-American women were usually considered to be somehow exotic, erotic and primitive among the society. "There is a connection between society's representation of Helga and her true identity by explaining the ways in which the various communities in which Helga participates force her in to this stereotypical female role."<sup>48</sup> The novel describes how women really felt during this period, how they lived and what problems they encountered. Helga ends up living unhappily as a mother of many children with her husband that she hates. Her dream of establishing her own self-identity disappears.

The stereotypes are also a topic, which is developed throughout the novel. Because Helga is travelling very often from one place to another, we encounter many different places in the book. Every time she settles somewhere, she is confronted with the stereotypes of the local society. These stereotypes expect an exact behaviour from Helga in order to suit the local manners. Helga hates these stereotypes and as soon as somebody wants her to settle down and to adapt herself, she runs away as quickly as possible. Freedom is very important for Helga.

The book also nicely depicts the inner life of a person and their identity. The author openly writes about her desires, her feelings and her experiences. Helga is trying to find her true self for all her life but she comes to realize, that there is no place where she can explore her identity and develop herself. Helga tries on many identities through her life – she is teacher, a niece, a black woman, a wife and a mother. She is not satisfied with any of them and when she becomes mother at the end of the book, it is the role that she cannot escape. Her motherhood is a result of her religious conversion and Helga cannot escape anymore because of her children. She is not able to leave them and it results in having more and more children.

Another topic that we can find mostly at the end of the book, is the topic of religion. We can see here not really a positive view on Christianity. The reason of Helga's conversion

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48 HAUBOLD, Kathrin. Nella Larsen - African-American Artist of the Harlem Renaissance. München: GRIN Verlag GmbH, 2011. ISBN 978-364-0856-336.



is that she finally hopes for an easier and simpler life. When she visits the church for the first time, she hopes to be saved. After a long search for her place in the world, this possibility looks very promising. It looks like an answer to her calling. She thinks that she will finally find a stability and true happiness while she marries Reverend Green. When she realizes it was a big mistake, it is too late. She cannot divorce or reject Christianity. She is tired of having children and being a mother but her neighbours tell her that it is “an act of God”. She is caught in a trap. She spends the rest of her life in a captivity by her husband, her children and also Christianity. Helga unfortunately never discovers her true identity and she is trapped in a search of herself.

## 4 COMPARISON OF THE BOOKS

Because Zora Neale Hurston and Nella Larsen are two contemporary Afro-American authors, in this part my diploma thesis, I would like to compare their novels *Quicksand* and *Their Eyes Were Watching God*. Both of these women were surprisingly born in the same year 1891<sup>49</sup> and they were important figures of the Harlem Renaissance movement.<sup>50</sup> Despite the fact, it was not usual for the women to publish books, these two authors were able to gain recognition. Zora Neale Hurston and Nella Larsen both grew up in the rural South. Their work is mostly autobiographical, inspired by their own lives and experiences. The main characters of their books are women, which have to face the question of race and identity. I will compare the language which the authors used in the novels, the main characters and the structure of the books. I will investigate the main similarities and differences.

### 4.1 Analysis of the language

The language that Zora Neale Hurston used in the novel *Their Eyes Were Watching God* is very rich. It consists of many dialects, metaphors and personifications. Through the language, the author evokes the atmosphere of the American South in the reader. Zora Neale Hurston uses long narratives and detailed descriptions and also very distinctive vocabulary. She depicts the nature precisely and uses imaginary very often. “In *Their Eyes Were Watching God* she documents and celebrates the artfulness of black folks’ language by re-creating the energy, rhythm, and textures of words that dance and sing.”<sup>51</sup>

The narrator of the whole book *Their Eyes Were Watching God* is the main protagonist – Janie Crawford. She is retelling the story of her life to her best friend Phoeby. Janie tells her about her childhood, her husbands and her experiences. The reader can see everything from Janie’s point of view. At the end of the book, after arriving to Eatonville at the end of Janie’s journey to womanhood, she finally becomes a strong personality with her own voice and identity.

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49 African American literature. In: ANDREWS, William. Encyclopedia Britannica [online]. 2014 [cit. 2015-01-29]. Available at: <http://www.britannica.com/EBchecked/topic/926640/African-American-literature/232357/Novelists>

50 The Harlem Renaissance. In: U.S.History [online]. 2014 [cit. 2015-01-29]. Available at: <http://www.ushistory.org/us/46e.asp>

51 LESTER, Neal A. *Understanding Zora Neale Hurston's Their eyes were watching God: a student casebook to issues, sources, and historical documents*. Westport, Conn.: Greenwood Press, 1999, xvii, 176 p. ISBN 03-133-0210-3.

The novel is strongly influenced by symbolism and figurative language features such as metaphors and personifications. Therefore, the language is very specific. A significant example of a symbolism in the book is a pear tree, which flowers or does not flower depending on Janie's life situation. "Hurston also illustrates her amazing capacity for metaphor in the many symbolic uses of trees throughout the novel to mark not only the protagonist's own desires but also the distance between her desires and the other persons in her orbit."<sup>52</sup> Another example is Janie's hair which symbolizes the beauty of a woman. Janie's husband Joe wanted her to tie up her hair which symbolizes their relationship directly. Joe restricted Janie and limited Janie's freedom. After his death, Janie freed her hair and also symbolically freed herself. A typical example of a personification is the hurricane, which is very powerful and it acts as a climax in the novel. Zora Neale Hurston heavily relies on a symbolism, folk tales and rhythm. This folk oral tradition is also incorporated into the novel in the form of porch sitters.<sup>53</sup>

As it was already mentioned, Zora Neale Hurston was interested in folklore, which is also nicely reflected in her novel. "Her incorporation of folk tales, lying contests, and other aspects of the oral tradition, adds dimension and texture to her narrative."<sup>54</sup> She uses dialects in order to make the characters alive and believable. Dialect is a spoken version of a language<sup>55</sup> and this dialect comes from the South of the United States. Dialects usually represent the whole culture and its traditional values. Because the writer also comes from South, it is much easier for her to depict the Southern black dialect authentically. At first glance, the dialect and the sentences seem unfamiliar to the reader and it is difficult to understand, but once you start to read, you see the basic patterns and the book become even readable.

In the novel, we can see the difference between the language of men and women. Not only they act differently, but they also use the language differently. The language of men is much more convincing, powerful – men usually have the final word. Women are much more

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52 KING, Lovalerie. The Cambridge introduction to Zora Neale Hurston. New York: Cambridge University Press, 2008, xiii, 137 p. ISBN 978-052-1670-951.

53 GARRETT-HATFIELD, Lori. Figurative Language Used in the Novel "Their Eyes Were Watching God". Seattlepi.com [online]. 2012 [cit. 2015-03-19]. Available at: <http://education.seattlepi.com/figurative-language-used-novel-their-eyes-were-watching-god-5505.html>

54 KING, Lovalerie. The Cambridge introduction to Zora Neale Hurston. New York: Cambridge University Press, 2008, xiii, 137 p. ISBN 978-052-1670-951.

55 Dialect. Oxford Dictionaries [online]. 2012 [cit. 2015-03-19]. Available at: <http://www.oxforddictionaries.com/definition/english/dialect>

submissive. This difference is visible already at the beginning of the book in the first paragraph. Despite the fact men and women are different, they depend on each other in some ways:

“Ships at a distance have every man’s wish on board. For some, they come in with the tide. For others they sail forever on the horizon, never out of sight, never landing until the Watcher turns his eyes away in resignation, his dreams mocked to death by Time. That is the life of men. Now, women forget all those things they don’t want to remember, and remember everything they don’t want to forget. The dream is the truth. Then they act and do things accordingly.”<sup>56</sup>

The language used by Nella Larsen in her novel *Quicksand* is completely different. She does not use the dialects, metaphors and figurative language. The sentences in this book are simple and clear. The book *Quicksand* is full of cultural references and it is even affected by a modernism. „Instead of depicting the folksy, rural Southerners or the urban Northern wits, who populate the works of African American writers Zora Neale Hurston, Langston Hughes, and Claude McKay, Larsen represents the black bourgeoisie in general and the female among this class in particular.“<sup>57</sup>

For the reader, this book is more readable and easier to understand. However, it lacks the dialects and the typical atmosphere of the black, rural South. It creates a distance between the readers and the characters in the novel. In comparison, when reading *Their Eyes Were Watching God*, it is like we are involved in the story. It is easy to get lost in the whole atmosphere of the novel, its dialects and characters. With regard to the fact that the books were written during the same period, *Quicksand* is written in a much modern style than the book *Their Eyes Were Watching God*.

The book *Quicksand* is written in a third person narrative from an omniscient point of view. The narrator guides us through the whole story and tells us about the life of Helga Crane. It is sometimes difficult to separate the narrator from the main character. The book is full of detailed descriptions so we can imagine the characters very easily. The main

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56 KING, Lovalerie. The Cambridge introduction to Zora Neale Hurston. New York: Cambridge University Press, 2008, xiii, 137 p. ISBN 978-052-1670-951.

57 Quicksand: Quicksand Essay - Critical Evaluation. Enotes [online]. 2012 [cit. 2015-03-20]. Available at: <http://www.enotes.com/topics/quicksand/critical-essays/critical-evaluation>

protagonist is characterized at the beginning of the book, where we can find long descriptions of her appearance. There are also exhaustive descriptions of the feelings and characters' thoughts, so it is easier for the reader to sympathise with them.

## 4.2 Setting

The novel *Their Eyes Were Watching God* is set in the early twentieth century – around 1920s and 1930s. The whole plot takes place in West Florida. The places mentioned in the book are Florida, Eatonville, Jacksonville and also Everglades. Janie spends the early years of her life in the house of her grandmother in West Florida. After her marriage with Logan Killicks, she moves to his house, which is still at this location. Everything changes after she falls in love with Joe Starks and they settle down together in a city of Eatonville. Joe Starks transforms this all-black city into a prosperous thriving town but still, it is not a place from Janie's dreams. This dream place she discovers after Joe's death, when she meets her third husband, Tea Cake. They together move to Jacksonville and later on to Everglades, a national park of Florida. Everglades is a place where Janie is finally happy. Despite the fact that she lives in poverty among the folk, she enjoys the life as it is. Her happiness unfortunately does not last long because of the devastating hurricane, which brings a tragedy on Janie and Tea Cake.

The setting of novel *Quicksand* is much more complicated. Because of the fact that the main protagonist Helga constantly moves from one place to another, we have to trace her across multiple geographic settings. In total, she moves five times in the novel.

At the beginning, Helga teaches at the Afro-American boarding school in Naxos. She becomes frustrated very soon because of the local atmosphere, and moves to her hometown – Chicago. She does not have a job and she experiences a period of deprivation. After some time, she gets a new opportunity which takes her to Harlem, a large neighbourhood in the New York City.<sup>58</sup> Harlem is a centre of black people and black culture, and Helga, because of her white ancestry, does not fit there. She travels to Denmark to her relatives but it is also not a place, where she would stay. She returns back to America where she marries Reverend Pleasant Green and they together end up in Alabama and have five children. However, it is

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58 Harlem: District, New York City, New York, United States. Encyclopaedia Britannica [online]. 2014 [cit. 2015-03-23]. Available at: <http://www.britannica.com/EBchecked/topic/255384/Harlem>

not clear from the ending of the novel whether it is the place where Helga settles down for the rest of her life.

Concerning the settings of the books, both of them has got something similar. The reader starts in one destination at the beginning and then has to travel with the main protagonist through many places and locations. Neither of the books is set in one place or city. In *Their Eyes Were Watching God* we travel around the West Florida, only through different cities and locations. However in *Quicksand*, Helga takes us from American cities like Chicago and the New York City on her journey to Copenhagen in Denmark, a country in Northern Europe, and then back to the United States, Alabama. As a result, the reader can get acquainted with several interesting destinations. Both of these novels were also set in the early 1900s, which is also similar.

### 4.3 Main characters

The main protagonists of the books are young women whose lives are traced during the period of the Harlem Renaissance. Both of these characters discover their identities during the novels as they gradually develop. The question of womanhood was very relevant during the Harlem Renaissance movement and the man writers were not able to portray this topic identically. Because of the established norms, black females were usually portrayed only as mothers, cooks, maids or wives, taking care of home. The early women writers, i.a. Zora Neale Hurston or Nella Larsen, had decided to change this. Their novels portray the black women in a completely different light.

Lynette Myles also compare the main protagonists of these novel: “By moving their heroines outside places that render them powerless, Larsen and Hurston show black female self-definition and female wholeness. As *Transient Women*, Helga Crane in *Quicksand* and Janie Crawford in *Their Eyes Were Watching God* demonstrate the importance of moving into both the psychological and the physical spaces for female consciousness and renewal.”<sup>59</sup>

At the beginning of the books, the main protagonists are young women who have

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59 MYLES, Lynette D. *Female subjectivity in African American women's narratives of enslavement: beyond borders*. 1st ed. New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2009, x, 195 p. ISBN 02-306-1593-7.

a whole life ahead of them. While Janie goes through many marriages during her life in order to find a true love, Helga is trying to find her place in the world where she could settle down and live a happy life. During their lives, they get a lot of life lessons and their characters develop gradually.

Janie Crawford is described in the novel *Their Eyes Were Watching God* as an attractive young girl with a long black hair and a light skin<sup>60</sup>. She learns about her history from her grandmother, Nanny. Nanny had experienced the years of slavery and she suggests her niece to marry an older black man Logan Killicks. However Janie is a very romantic person, she dreams about a true love and an adventurous life. Her first two marriages end in a disaster. Janie is unable to obey her husbands and she is still stubbornly trying to make her voice heard. For the third time, she finally finds the love of her life. Tea Cake respects Janie as a woman, a lover and a friend. Her happiness is unfortunately ruined very soon by the hurricane. Tea Cake's illness suddenly results in his unexpected death. Despite the fact that Janie had to shoot him and she is very sad, she realizes that she had lived a full and satisfactory life.

Helga is also portrayed as a nice young woman and a teacher. She is dissatisfied with her life and her job, and she is constantly trying to find a place, a place where she belongs. She moves many times in order to find her home and her place within the society. She had to face a lot of problems during her life, usually connected with her racial or gender identity. At the end of the book, when Helga thinks that she finally has the good fortune and will be saved, she gets into a situation from which she cannot escape. As a mother of five children, she spends the rest of her life with a man she hates.

The main protagonists are similar in many ways. Both Janie and Helga had to face the problem of a different skin color and this theme is also a central theme of the books. They did not have parents and a complete family. Both of them were trying to carve out their place in the world, but each of them in a different way. While Helga is unhappy and depressed at the end of the book still hoping for a better life, Janie realizes that she should be satisfied because she finally had found a true love.

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60 HURSTON, Zora Neale and Introduced by Zadie SMITH. *Their eyes were watching God*. Repr. London: Virago, 2007. ISBN 978-086-0685-241.

## 4.4 Structure of the books

The novel *Quicksand* is written in a narrative structure. The author of the book presents a narrative about a young woman to a reader. “Like a portrait painter, Larsen’s narrator positions Helga inside frames and strategically places her at the center of the settings in which she appears.”<sup>61</sup> This narrative is divided into twenty-five chapters.

The novel itself is introduced with a few lines from the poem *Cross* written by Langston Hughes:<sup>62</sup>

*My old man died in a fine big house.  
My ma died in a shack.  
I wonder where I’m gonna die,  
Being neither white nor black?*

It is an epigraph and it deals with the topic of racial dualism. This poem depicts very nicely the whole plot of the book. It makes the reader think and imagine, what is it about. It immediately awakes the interest of the reader. Larsen develops the topic of searching one’s place in a world, which was also very familiar to Langston Hughes.

The book *Their Eyes Were Watching God* is also structured in the context of frames. It begins and ends with the same scene. Janie and Phoeby are sitting on the porch of Janie’s house. “While opening scenes of *Their Eyes Were Watching God* set Janie up as the storyteller, the narrative unfolds through a third-person point of view. The story begins with an ode to the Horizon and Janie Crawford’s return to Eatonville after having buried Tea Cake and stood trial for killing him.”<sup>63</sup> After that, Janie begins to narrate a story to her best friend Phoeby and the author invites us to Janie’s life.

The book is divided into twenty chapters and we can distinguish between four frameworks in the book. The first unit depicts Janie’s childhood and adolescent years, when

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61 Barnett, Pamela. “My Picture of You Is, After All, the True Helga Crane: Portraiture and Identity in Nella Larsen’s *Quicksand*.” *Signs: Journal of Women in Culture and Society* 20.3 (Spring 1995): 575-600.

62 LARSEN, Nella a Thadious M. DAVIS. *Quicksand*. New York: Penguin Books, 2002, xxxvii, 154 p. ISBN 01-411-8127-3.

63 KING, Lovalerie. *The Cambridge introduction to Zora Neale Hurston*. New York: Cambridge University Press, 2008, xiii, 137 p. ISBN 978-052-1670-951.



Janie is living with her grandmother. During the second part, the reader finds out information about Nanny's life and also something about Janie's mother. It emphasizes Nanny's love to Janie and her wish to secure a comfortable life for Janie. Also Janie's first marriage with Logan Killicks is described here. In the third part, Janie already lives with Joe Starks. The first years are happy but later Janie suffers from Joe's possessive love. He is trying to control Janie and treats her like his possession. The last framework of the novel is about Janie's marriage to Tea Cake. She finds the love she had always dreamt about. Unfortunately, her happiness does not last long due to Tea Cake's death. The whole story is complete when Janie retold her experience to Phoeby.

#### 4.5 Similarities and differences

The main similarity of the books *Their Eyes Were Watching God* and *Quicksand* is that the main protagonists are both black women searching for their own identity. Both of the books guide the reader through a journey towards their self-realization. "The protagonists' lives (childhood, adolescence, and adulthood/womanhood/motherhood) are traced during times of slavery, the antebellum period, the post-bellum period, and the Harlem Renaissance. Their experiences in each stage of life in relation to societal norms present the identity crisis present in each novel"<sup>64</sup> Janie and Helga are trying to find a place which is usually called a home. They are dreaming about a true love, friends, and their own place in the world. Their searching for an identity involves struggling with their place as black and female.

Both novels are partly autobiographical. The authors put bits and pieces from their own lives into these novel. They used their own experiences. Nella Larsen was a daughter of a West Indian father and a Danish mother. She was a biracial child as well as the main protagonist of her book, *Helga Crane*. The conflict that Helga has to face, is truly realistic. In contrast, the main protagonist of the book *Their Eyes Were Watching God* is a black woman, as well as the author Zora Neale Hurston."Zora Neale Hurston looked black and could not 'pass' as white; however, from a young age, Hurston had a different sense of her identity, not summing up her entire identity in terms of being an African American woman."<sup>65</sup>

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64 Delaney-Lawrence, Ava P., "The quest for identity in Frances W. Harper's *Iola Leroy*, Nella Larsen's *Quicksand* and Zora Neale Hurston's *Their Eyes Were Watching God*." (2012). *ETD Collection for Robert W. Woodruff Library, Atlanta University Center*. Paper 297.

65 Nella Larsen's 'Passing' & Zora Neale Hurston's 'Their Eyes Were Watching God'. *Women & Madness* [online]. 2012 [cit. 2015-03-23]. Available at: <https://womenandmadness.wordpress.com/2012/11/18/nella-larsens-passing-zora-neale-hurtons-their-eyes-were-watching-god/>

Other similarities are the main themes of the books. The issue of race, black culture, different forms of racism, race-identity or self-realization are developed in both of the novels. The reader can find typical problems that most woman had to face during this period of early 1900s. Also the searching for a suitable life partner is the thing that the main protagonists have in common. Janie is successful and she finds a true love with Tea Cake, but Helga Crane is not able to find the right man. Her husband Reverend Pleasant Green is definitely not the one she had always dreamt about.

The last very similar thing is the tragic ending. In *Their Eyes Were Watching God*, there is the hurricane, which destroys the whole city and during which also Tea Cake got bitten by a rabid dog. When he becomes ill, Janie has to shoot him in a self-defense. In *Quicksand*, Helga Crane ends up in Alabama, with a husband she does not love and suffering from frequent pregnancies. She is dreaming about escaping again but she is not able to leave her children.

When looking at main differences of these novels, it is definitely the language used. Zora Neale Hurston uses dialects and figurative language much more than Nella Larsen. At first, it is not easy to read but the reader gets used to it very soon. It nicely depicts the atmosphere of the rural South and the black culture. The language of *Quicksand* is, on the other hand, very modern. Nella Larsen uses clear language and sentences and does not use metaphors and figurative language so often. Despite the fact that both novels were written during the same period, the language used is totally different.

Another difference is the age of the main protagonists. In *Their Eyes Were Watching God*, the reader follows Janie from her early years. She gradually becomes a grown and experienced woman during the novel. In *Quicksand*, the reader firstly meets with Helga when she is already more than twenty years old and she is a teacher. Her character, however, also gradually develops and at the end of the book, she is a mother of five children.

To conclude this part, it is obvious that these book has got many similar features. The main characters had to face similar problems and the reader witnesses their lives and choices. There is an evident influence of the Harlem Renaissance period in both novels.

## **5 POSSIBLE USE OF THE BOOKS IN ENGLISH LANGUAGE TEACHING**

### **5.1 Target students**

It is necessary for the teacher to know, how old are the students that they is going to teach, before they actually enters the class. This information is very important because they has to adjust the materials according the level of the students, their age, special learning needs and many other factors. Before the lesson, the teacher should set the aim of the lesson and according to this aim, they should create an effective lesson plan. It is much easier for the teacher, if they knows the students a little. This can help to choose suitable topics and to motivate the students.

Despite the fact that reading books in a foreign language is usually connected with the university students, the literature could be presented also at the primary or secondary school. When the teacher chooses a suitable book at the proper level, there should be no problem. With children, the teacher obviously uses different sources and materials than with adults. With younger learners, it is better to choose simple texts with short sentences and colourful pictures. Children love fairy-tales, fables or interesting short stories. It is very effective to use a story with some moral lesson. With older students, we can choose some interesting short story, a play or just a few chapters from an interesting book.

It is very important to be aware of the age of the learners. With young learners, the lesson should be simple and the teacher should concentrate on basic and useful things and grammar. When teaching young children, it is very helpful to use games, poems, pictures, visual aids, jokes and to change the activities very often. Otherwise the children get bored very soon.

The secondary school students already do not appreciate fairy-tales very much. It is usually very difficult for the teacher to catch their attention and to hit their taste. When choosing literature, the teacher can succeed with some controversial and touching topic or at least some contemporary and popular piece of writing.

When teaching adults, the lessons are totally different. Adults who are learning English generally do it for business reasons or for the purpose of a real-life communication. They need to know the basic rules and grammar but it is the communication what is the most important for them. They want to be able to order a lunch in restaurant, to communicate at a business meeting or at a shop, or to be able to properly and fluently introduce and present themselves.

The level of the students should be also considered when choosing some materials for the class. We can use a bit more difficult texts that go beyond the level of the students. This is sometimes even desirable. The students are trying to understand the text and guess the meaning of the unknown words. They can discuss possible interpretations. But still, they do understand the majority and they are able to catch what is going on. If the teacher chooses too difficult text, the students become demotivated very soon. They do not know, what is it about, and their interest rapidly decreases.

## **5.2 Discussion themes and questions**

It is very important to consider the theme of the lesson before presenting it. The teacher should know the learners well in order to choose relevant and interesting materials. They should take into account not only the level of the English language but also individual student's preferences. Some topics may be too sensitive for some students. It is therefore better to first get to know the students before the teacher begins to discuss sensitive topics.

With topics such as race, racism, gender or equality, the teacher should expect various and different opinions. The students are often influenced by their parents, friends, media or other sources – everyone can perceive this issues in a different way. The teacher should be objective and they should not change the students' opinions according to his/her image. The teacher should present as many different perspectives as they is able to. It is up to the students to choose their own way.

The most important themes, which could be used in the classroom discussion, were already mentioned. The central themes of the novels are the racism and race inequality, gender, love and self-realization. The students should have at least basic understanding about these issues.

### **5.3 Benefits of using books in English lessons**

As I already mentioned in the introduction, it can be very beneficial for the learners to use literature and books when teaching English language. Since the traditional language approaches had been formed, using the authentic text or books is becoming less popular. Teachers usually use a textbook, which is designed according to the age and the language level of the learners, and they do not change their methods and techniques for years. It is obviously much more comfortable for them because they do not have to do any extra work and preparation for their lessons. They just go exercise by exercise through the whole textbook and they consider this practice as sufficient enough. On one hand, it is more comfortable for the teacher and also for the learners. They just buy one textbook and workbook, they do not have to bring a lot of papers and they only learn what is written there when there is a test taking place. On the other hand, it is a pity not to offer the students other options through which they could develop their language and communication skills. Several modern methods and techniques has been developed in the previous years that can be easily incorporated into the teaching of English language. As an example we can mention games, brainstorming, group work or drama techniques. The teacher should be always aware of the age and the level of the learner. Their task is to choose the techniques and activities that are appropriate for the learner. Properly chosen methods and techniques can motivate and inspire the learner and help them to become independent.

There are many good reasons why to use the literature when teaching English language. Literature is an authentic piece of the target language. It is not modified in order to be easier for the learners. It represents real written language and it can open a window into a totally different culture where the language is spoken. The learner can see different characters from other cultures and the way how they behave, how they think or what traditions do they have. Despite the fact that it is from different country or a different part of world, some universal topics (i.a. love, war, friendship or death) are familiar to all human beings. It should help the learners to understand new cultures and to develop tolerance towards them. It may also awake an interest in them and maybe finally they will read this book themselves.

It is also a valuable source of new vocabulary and new grammatical structures for the learners. “Literary texts offer a rich source of linguistic input and can help learners to practise

the four skills – speaking, listening, reading and writing – in addition to exemplifying grammatical structures and presenting new vocabulary.”<sup>66</sup> Despite the fact that they do not understand everything, they may guess the meaning from the context. This process develops their imagination and the ability to understand the texts.

If the teacher is able to provide an interesting piece of literature to the students (with an appropriate level of English and age) and they are able to motivate them enough, it may awake a personal interest among the students. They can, for example, feel close to some characters or just become interested about what will happen next. The students are drawn to the text and some of them may build up a closer relationship to the books and literature itself.

Literature can be used only as an extra material in some special classes in order to expand the students’ knowledge and to show them new opportunities when learning English language. In this case, only short extracts, poems or some chapters of novels are used. But it can be also used for a longer period of time. It is great to encourage the students to read books. It can be motivating for them to read the whole book in a different language. It obviously depends on the level of the learner, but there is also a wide range of simplified versions of books available.

John McRae<sup>67</sup> talks about two types of literature. Among the first type belong the classical texts by e.g. William Shakespeare or Charles Dickens. The second type is the popular literature like fiction or fables. The best option is not to restrict the learner to only classical texts or only popular literature but to present both options. The teacher should not be too subjective when preparing materials for the learners.

The teacher’s role is to prepare suitable materials for all the learners and it certainly is a difficult task. They should be aware of the learners with specific learning difficulties and of special needs of some learners. They should definitely consider the length of the book, its complexity, the level of vocabulary or interesting illustrations. When using literature in a class, the teacher should choose the appropriate level of the English language. It does not matter if the learners do not understand everything but it could be demotivating, if they do not understand the meaning of it. Good idea is to choose a film which was based on a book

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66 Using Literature - Introduction. British Council [online]. 2014 [cit. 2015-03-18]. Available at: <http://www.teachingenglish.org.uk/node/3805/try/resources/britlit>

67 McRae, J (1994) Literature with a small 'l', Macmillan Education.

which is then much easier for the students, if they can imagine the characters and visualize them. The literature used in a class could be accompanied by various visual aids, presentations, CDaudio recordings. If the book is chosen well, students can feel a sense of accomplishment at the end of it – they mastered to read the whole book in English language. Using literature can be an enjoyable way of teaching English language.

## 5.4 Commentary on the lesson plans

### 5.4.1 Lesson Plan 1

*Their Eyes Were Watching God* by Zora Neale Hurston

The first lesson plan deals with the novel *Their Eyes Were Watching God* by Zora Neale Hurston. It is planned for a ninety-minutes-long lesson. The level of the English language of the target students should be at least B1. It is designed for a secondary school students with regard to the topics that appear in the book. The main aim of the lesson is to briefly introduce the Harlem Renaissance movement and the book *Their Eyes Were Watching God* to the students and to make them involved in a discussion. The lesson is divided into four main parts.

At the beginning of the lesson, there will be a short introduction in order to indicate what the students will discuss for the whole lesson. The teacher will write several questions in the board and give some time to the students to think about it. They should express their opinions and thoughts and they can compare their views with their classmates'.

In the second part of the lesson the students will already deal with the book *Their Eyes Were Watching God*. The teacher will distribute the copies of the first two pages from the novel. The aim of this activity is to take a closer look on the dialects and the specific language which was used by Zora Neale Hurston. They will probably not understand everything but they could guess the meaning. The teacher can revise, what is a dialect and what types of dialects do they know.

The next stage of the lesson is a group activity. The class will be divided into a groups of five people. Each group will be given a certain topic by the teacher. Their task is to find out available information from the sources and to prepare a short presentation about this topic. They will have some time and then they should present the topic to their classmates. The presentations should be about five minutes long and the students should include only the most important facts. They will have a various sources available and each group should work as effectively as possible.

The last stage of the lesson should conclude the whole lesson. The students will be



given a quotation from the end of the book and they should suggest an appropriate ending. At the end of the lesson they should at least have an idea of what the book is about. They should suggest what will happen at the end and if Janie will find a true love or not.

During the lesson, the teacher is limited by the time range very much. It is impossible to go through the whole book, to discuss the language, the main characters, the plot of the novel and the main themes. The teacher must choose the most appropriate activities. It should not be the aim of the lesson to teach as many pieces of information and facts as possible. The main aim is to develop the student's basic understanding of the time period and to show them the options they can take. It is up to the individual person, if they will read the book afterwards but if they will at least remember the name of the book, the author or some interesting information, the aim of the lesson was achieved.

## 5.4.2 Lesson Plan 2

*Quicksand* by Nella Larsen

This lesson plan deals with the book *Quicksand* by Nella Larsen. It is also intended for secondary school students with the level of English at least B1. This lesson serves as an introduction to the Harlem Renaissance period and the Harlem Renaissance movement. The whole lesson is divided into five stages. During the first half of the lesson, the students will be introduced into the theoretical background and they will use their existing knowledge from the history lessons. The second half of the lesson is more practical and there are several activities for the students.

At the beginning of the lesson, there is a warm-up activity in groups. The students should write on the paper as many associations with the Harlem Renaissance as possible. If they do not know this term at all, they should write what they imagine, when they encounter this word. The group with the most words which really associates with the topic of the Harlem Renaissance wins.

In the second stage, there will be a Power Point presentation which will introduce the theoretical background to the students. The teacher should present basic facts about the Harlem Renaissance movement.

During the next stage of the lesson, the students will work with the novel *Quicksand* written by Nella Larsen. They had a homework from the last lesson to read the first chapter of this novel, so they can work with it. The first task is to find out as many characteristics of Helga Crane as possible. There are many of them in the first chapter of the novel. The aim of this activity is to describe the appearance and typical characteristics of the main protagonist. It will help our imagination to create an image of Helga Crane. The second activity deals with the introductory poem from the beginning of the book. There are few lines written by Langston Hughes which serves as an epigraph and it may indicate the plot of the entire book. This poem should be the topic of a whole-class discussion.

The last activity should conclude the whole lesson and the topic of racial

discrimination. The students should think about how it was in the past and if the white and black people were treated equally or not. They can compare the past and today's situation.

## 6 CONCLUSIONS

The main aim of my diploma thesis was the analysis of the two books from the period of the Harlem Renaissance, their comparison and a practical example of how they could be used in English language teaching.

In my project, I chose the period of the Harlem Renaissance movement because it is one of the most significant period of the time in the United States. In the first part of my diploma thesis, I tried to summarize the available materials and to create a comprehensive overview of this important period of time. The extent of this thesis does not allow to cover the whole issue in depth, but still it could serve as a lucid introduction to the Harlem Renaissance period. This part of the thesis represents a theoretical overview of this issue.

In the next part of my diploma thesis I focused mostly on the authors of the novels. During the Harlem Renaissance movement, it was not usual for the women to publish books. It was mostly the men, who were successful artists, musicians, poets or writers. Even despite this fact, Zora Neale Hurston and Nella Larsen represents one of the most famous writers of the time. Their work is well-known all over the world.

Because the authors both put many autobiographical elements into their novels, it is interesting to investigate their own lives. Both of them have got an interesting life story which make their novels even more powerful for the reader. I tried to find out what authentic experiences they used while writing these books.

A substantial part of my diploma thesis deals with the analysis of the books and their subsequent comparison. I tried to analyse the language in which the books were written. The authors had adopted different styles and language devices, which illustrate the overall atmosphere. The structure of the entire book is also important. I took a closer look especially on the main characters. The protagonists of both books are female characters that are have a similar fate in many ways. Because both books were created during the same period of time, I wanted to compare whether they are similar or not.

In the last chapter of my thesis, a special attention was given to the topic of how the books can be effectively used when teaching English language. This method of teaching

English language is not used very often. And that's a shame. Literary works are the most accessible source of an authentic language. For the students, it also represents a change from the daily routine of school teaching. They can learn new vocabulary and also something about different cultures. It is obviously the teacher's task to motivate the students properly and to choose suitable materials. It is necessary to consider the age of the students and also the level of their English I

Because of the fact that these novels are not typically used in English lessons, I tried to illustrate that it is also possible. In order to demonstrate this, I suggested one lesson plan for each book as an example. Each lesson plan is planned for ninety minutes. I suggested specific steps and activities that the teacher can perform during the English lesson.

From the student perspective, this method is also very useful and efficient. I can state this based on my own experience. It is very important not to obey only one method but constantly change activities if we want the students to become interested. The students will learn about some interesting literary works in a fun way, using a variety of activities and games. There is no need to worry that the books are too demanding or difficult for the students. The teachers often underestimate their students, which is unnecessary. The students are able to understand more complex sentences. If the student chooses a book, they are looking for something different than what media or television can offer. School is a place where the students should acquire new impulses that help them to develop.

In my work, I wanted to show that even (at the first glance) challenging novels can be interesting to use when teaching English and they can enrich the knowledge of students. It is the teacher's job to bring new impulses that will motivate the students to perform better.

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## **APPENDICES**

**Appendix 1: *Lesson plan 1***

**Appendix 2: *Lesson Plan 1 (Text)***

**Appendix 3: *Lesson plan 2***

**Appendix 4: *Lesson Plan 2 (Text)***

## **Appendix 1: Lesson plan 1**

*Their Eyes Were Watching God* by Zora Neale Hurston

**Subject:** English language

**Students:** Secondary students (B1)

**Materials:**

- ⌚ the book *Their Eyes Were Watching God*, blackboard, dictionaries, copies of the parts of book, computers, a pen

**Topic of the lesson:** The Harlem Renaissance Movement

**Terms:** The Harlem Renaissance, Zora Neale Hurston, *Their Eyes Were Watching God*, jazz, racism, equality, Afro-American writers

**Time range:** 90 minutes

**Classroom arrangement:**

- ⌚ Classroom work
- ⌚ Group work

**Objectives of the lesson:**

- ⌚ Students are active and they are involved in the discussion.
- ⌚ Students are able to find out important information from various sources.
- ⌚ Students are able to prepare a short presentation.

**Organizational structure of the lesson:**

- **Introduction** (15 minutes)

At the beginning of the lesson, before reading the book, I would like to do a little introduction of the themes that are present in this novel. I will write four questions on the blackboard and I would like the students to think about the answers. I expect different opinions from the students and I would like to discuss their opinions and give them an opportunity to freely express their thoughts.

Questions:

Do white people and black people have the same rights? Was it the same in the past?

Are women and men treated equally in the society?

What are the roles of men and women in a relationship?

What do you imagine under the term a true love?

➤ **Starting the novel** (15 minutes)

In this part of the lesson, I will distribute copies of the first two pages from the novel. I will ask the students to read the first dialogue from the page 2. I think that they will be surprised by the language used. I am curious about their reactions and I will ask them what they think about it. We will discuss the use of dialects and vernacular in this novel. I will assure the students that it is difficult to understand at first, but once they get used to it, it is very readable. I would like them to find some examples of vernacular language. I can play a short video from the internet as other examples of southern dialect.

Examples:<sup>68</sup>

“What he done wid all her money?”

“What she doin’ coming back here in dem overhalls?”

“What dat ole forty year ole ‘oman doin’ wid her hair swingin down...?”

➤ **Group Work** (45 minutes )

I will divide the whole class into a group of about five people. Each group will be given a topic, which they have to investigate. The task is to find out the most important information about the given topic and to present it in 5-10 minutes to the classmates. I will provide various sources they can use (books, dictionaries, copies from books). If it is possible, they can even use the internet. They should introduce their topic to their classmates in order to explain new terms and to practice the ability of presentation.

Possible topics of short presentations:

- ⌚ The Harlem Renaissance
- ⌚ Zora Neale Hurston
- ⌚ Works of Zora Neale Hurston
- ⌚ The novel *Quicksand*
- ⌚ Main characters of the book
- ⌚ Music

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68 HURSTON, Zora Neale a Introduced by Zadie SMITH. Their eyes were watching God. Repr. London: Virago, 2007. ISBN 978-086-0685-241.

➤ **Conclusion** (15 minutes)

At the end of the lesson, I would like the students to read a quotation from the book:

“The wind came back with triple fury, and put out the light for the last time. They sat in company with the others in other shanties, their eyes straining against crude walls and their souls asking if He meant to measure their puny might against His.

They seemed to be staring at the dark, but their eyes were watching God.”<sup>69</sup>

*This quotation is from the end of the novel when there is the hurricane. This is the main conflict of the novel and I would like the students to guess, if this book has got a happy ending or not. They may have different opinions and we can discuss it. After that I will conclude this lesson with evaluation of their work and I will thank them for their participation.*

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<sup>69</sup> HURSTON, Zora Neale a Introduced by Zadie SMITH. Their eyes were watching God. Repr. London: Virago, 2007. ISBN 978-086-0685-241.

## **Appendix 2: Lesson Plan 1 (Text)**

“Ships at a distance have every man’s wish on board. For some they come in with the tide. For others they sail forever on the horizon, never out of sight, never landing until the Watcher turns his eyes away in resignation, his dreams mocked to death by Time. That is the life of men.

Now, women forget all those things they don’t want to remember, and remember everything they don’t want to forget. The dream is the truth. Then they act and do things accordingly.

So the beginning of this was a woman and she had come back from burying the dead. Not the dead of sick and ailing with friends at the pillow and the feet. She had come back from the sodden and the bloated; the sudden dead, their eyes flung wide open in judgment.

The people all saw her come because it was sundown. The sun was gone, but he had left his footprints in the sky. It was the time for sitting on porches beside the road. It was the time to hear things and talk. These sitters had been tongueless, earless, eyeless conveniences all day long. Mules and other brutes had occupied their skins. But now, the sun and the bossman were gone, so the skins felt powerful and human. They became lords of sounds and lesser things. They passed nations through their mouths. They sat in judgment.

Seeing the woman as she was made them remember the envy they had stored up from other times. So they chewed up the back parts of their minds and swallowed with relish. They made burning statements with questions, and killing tools out of laughs. It was mass cruelty. A mood come alive. Words walking without masters; walking altogether like harmony in a song.

“What she doin’ coming back here in dem overhalls? Can’t she find no dress to put on? - Where’s dat blue satin dress she left here in? – Where all dat money her husband took and died and left her? – What dat ole forty year ole ’oman doin’ wid her hair swingin’ down her back lak some young gal? – Where she left dat young lad of a boy she went off here wid? – Thought she was going to marry? – Where he left her? – What he done wid all her money? – Betcha he off wid some gal so young she ain’t even got no hairs – why she don’t stay in her class?–”

When she got to where they were she turned her face on the bander log and spoke. They scrambled a noisy “good evenin’” and left their mouths setting open and their ears full of hope. Her speech was pleasant enough, but she kept walking straight on to her gate. The porch couldn’t talk for looking.”

(Source: HURSTON, Zora Neale a Introduced by Zadie SMITH. *Their eyes were watching God*. Repr. London: Virago, 2007. ISBN 978-086-0685-241.)

### **Appendix 3: Lesson plan 2**

*Quicksand* by Nella Larsen

**Subject:** English language

**Students:** Secondary students (B1)

**Materials:**

- ⌚ Copies from the novel *Quicksand*, papers, pens, PC, Powerpoint presentation, dictionaries

**Topic of the lesson:** The Harlem Renaissance Movement

**Time range:** 90 minutes

**Classroom arrangement:**

- ⌚ Classroom work
- ⌚ Group work
- ⌚ Pair work

**Objectives of the lesson:**

- ⌚ Students understand the term Harlem Renaissance movement.
- ⌚ Students are able to describe the main protagonist of the book, Helga Crane.
- ⌚ Students are willing to present their ideas and to be involved in the discussion.

**Organizational structure of the lesson:**

- **Introduction, warm-up activity** (15 minutes)

We will focus this lesson on the topic of the Harlem Renaissance and the Afro-American literature, and I would like to introduce Nella Larsen and her novel *Quicksand* to the students. At the beginning of the lesson, I would like to do a little warm-up activity. This activity will help me to open the topic of the Harlem Renaissance. I will divide the class into a groups of 4 people. Their task will be to write on a paper as many things as they already know about the Harlem Renaissance and their associations with this term. I will give them enough time and we will discuss it together later.

➤ **The Harlem Renaissance movement** (15 minutes)

This part of the lesson will be theoretical. I will prepare a presentation for the students or at least I will present the theoretical facts about the Harlem Renaissance movement (what is it, why did this movement appear and when/where, etc.). This background information is necessary, because not all of the students know those facts. It will follow the brainstorming activity at the beginning, which will serve as a nice introduction.

➤ **Reading the novel** (40 minutes)

In this part of the lesson I prepared two activities for the students.

**Activity 1:**

The first activity is connected with the first chapter and the main protagonist of the book, Helga Crane. The task for the students was to go through the first and second chapter of *Quicksand* (ap. 7 pages) and to note down as many information about Helga as they are able to. There are nice characteristics of her present at the beginning of the book. It is obvious that they will not understand all the vocabulary, but it does not matter. They will work with the text and look up only the information about Helga, her appearance, her job, her feelings, etc. I expect that all of them will have something a little bit different. We can discuss what they found out about Helga and I would like them to answer the following questions:

- What is the name of the main protagonist?
- How does she look like? Can you describe her appearance?
- How old is Helga?
- What is her job? Where does she work?
- Does she like her job?
- Are there some other characters mentioned?

**Activity 2:**

I will show them the four lines of a poem written by Langston Hughes that are at the beginning of the novel. I will ask the students why do they think the author put this poem into her novel. Does it have any hidden meaning? Is this poem somehow to with the main protagonist of the book? Why do you think she feels neither white nor black? These questions

I would like the students to think about.

“My old man died in a fine big house.

My ma died in a shack.

I wonder where I’m gonna die,

Being neither white nor black?”<sup>70</sup>

➤ **Pair Work Activity** (10 minutes)

The last activity, in order to complete the lesson, is a pair-work activity. The task for the students is to discuss if the white and black people were treated equally in the past and why. I would like them to think about the topic of racism, if it is still present nowadays and why is it dangerous.

➤ **Conclusion** (10 minutes)

At the end of the lesson we will discuss their findings and I will evaluate students’ work and thank them for their participation.

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<sup>70</sup> LARSEN, Nella a Thadious M DAVIS. Quicksand. New York: Penguin Books, 2002, xxxvii, 154 p. ISBN 01-411-8127-3.



#### **Appendix 4: Lesson Plan 2 (Text)**

“HELGA CRANE sat alone in her room, which at that hour, eight in the evening, was in soft gloom. Only a single reading lamp, dimmed by a great black and red shade, made a pool of light on the blue Chinese carpet, on the bright covers of the books which she had taken down from their long shelves, on the white pages of the opened one selected, on the shining brass bowl crowded with many-colored nasturtiums beside her on the low table, and on the oriental silk which covered the stool at her slim feet. It was a comfortable room, furnished with rare and intensely personal taste, flooded with Southern sun in the day, but shadowy just then with the drawn curtains and single shaded light. Large, too. So large that the spot where Helga sat was a small oasis in a desert of darkness. And eerily quiet. But that was what she liked after her taxing day's work, after the hard classes, in which she gave willingly and unsparingly of herself with no apparent return. She loved this tranquillity, this quiet, following the fret and strain of the long hours spent among fellow members of a carelessly unkind and gossiping faculty, following the strenuous rigidity of conduct required in this huge educational community of which she was an insignificant part. This was her rest, this intentional isolation for a short while in the evening, this little time in her own attractive room with her own books. To the rapping of other teachers, bearing fresh scandals, or seeking information, or other more concrete favors, or merely talk, at that hour Helga Crane never opened her door.

An observer would have thought her well fitted to that framing of light and shade. A slight girl of twenty-two years, with narrow, sloping shoulders and delicate, but well-turned, arms and legs, she had, none the less, an air of radiant, careless health. In vivid green and gold negligee and glistening brocaded mules, deep sunk in the big high-backed chair, against whose dark tapestry her sharply cut face, with skin like yellow satin, was distinctly outlined, she was — to use a hackneyed word — attractive. Black, very broad brows over soft, yet penetrating, dark eyes, and a pretty mouth, whose sensitive and sensuous lips had a slight questioning petulance and a tiny dissatisfied droop, were the features on which the observer's attention would fasten; though her nose was good, her ears delicately chiseled, and her curly blue-black hair plentiful and always straying in a little wayward, delightful way. Just then it was tumbled, falling unrestrained about her face and on to her shoulders.

Helga Crane tried not to think of her work and the school as she sat there. Ever since her arrival in Naxos she had striven to keep these ends of the days from the intrusion of irritating thoughts and worries. Usually she was successful. But not this evening. Of the books which she had taken from their places she had decided on Marmaduke Pickthall's *Said*

*the Fisherman*. She wanted forgetfulness, complete mental relaxation, rest from thought of any kind. For the day had been more than usually crowded with distasteful encounters and stupid perversities. The sultry hot Southern spring had left her strangely tired, and a little unnerved. And annoying beyond all other happenings had been that affair of the noon period, now again thrusting itself on her already irritated mind.

She had counted on a few spare minutes in which to indulge in the sweet pleasure of a bath and a fresh, cool change of clothing. And instead her luncheon time had been shortened, as had that of everyone else, and immediately after the hurried gulping down of a heavy hot meal the hundreds of students and teachers had been herded into the sun-baked chapel to listen to the banal, the patronizing, and even the in suiting remarks of one of the renowned white preachers of the state.

Helga shuddered a little as she recalled some of the statements made by that holy white man of God to the black folk sitting so respectfully before him.

This was, he had told them with obvious sectional pride, the finest school for Negroes anywhere in the country, north or south; in fact, it was better even than a great many schools for white children. And he had dared any Northerner to come south and after looking upon this great institution to say that the Southerner mistreated the Negro. And he had said that if all Negroes would only take a leaf out of the book of Naxos and conduct them selves in the manner of the Naxos products, there would be no race problem, because Naxos Negroes knew what was expected of them. They had good sense and they had good taste. They knew enough to stay in their places, and that, said the preacher, showed good taste. He spoke of his great admiration for the Negro race, no other race in so short a time had made so much progress, but he had urgently besought them to know when and where to stop. He hoped, he sincerely hoped, that they wouldn't become avaricious and grasping, thinking only of adding to their earthly goods, for that would be a sin in the sight of Almighty God. And then he had spoken of contentment, embellishing his words with scriptural quotations and pointing out to them that it was their duty to be satisfied the estate to which they had been called, hewers of wood and drawers of water. And then he had prayed.

Sitting there in her room, long hours after, Helga again felt a surge of hot anger and seething resentment. And again it subsided in amazement at the memory of the consider able applause which had greeted the speaker just before he had asked his God's blessing upon them.

The South. Naxos. Negro education. Suddenly she hated them all. Strange, too, for this was the thing which she had ardently desired to share in, to be a part of this monument to

one man's genius and vision. She pinned a scrap of paper about the bulb under the lamp's shade, for, having discarded her book in the certainty that in such a mood even Said and his audacious villainy could not charm her, she wanted an even more soothing darkness. She wished it were vacation, so that she might get away for a time.

"No, forever!" she said aloud."

(Source: LARSEN, Nella a Thadious M DAVIS. Quicksand. New York: Penguin Books, 2002, xxxvii, 154 p. ISBN 01-411-8127-3.)

## RÉSUMÉ

Diplomová práce je zaměřena na Afro-americkou literaturu z období Harlemské renesance. Zabývá se rozborem a srovnáním knih od dvou významných spisovatelek z tohoto období, Nellou Larsen a Zorou Neale Hurston, a jejich využitím při výuce anglického jazyka. Využití literatury při výuce anglického jazyka se stává velice efektivní metodou, jak seznámit studenty s literární tvorbou autorů různých národností. Byly navrženy konkrétní plány hodin obsahující aktivity využívající tyto knihy.

## ANOTACE

<b>Jméno a příjmení:</b>	Bc. Michaela Harenčáková
<b>Katedra nebo ústav:</b>	Katedra anglického jazyka
<b>Vedoucí práce:</b>	Mgr. Andrea Hoffmannová Ph.D.
<b>Rok obhajoby:</b>	2015

<b>Název práce:</b>	Spisovatelky Harlemské renesance
<b>Název v angličtině:</b>	Women Writers of the Harlem Renaissance
<b>Anotace práce:</b>	Hlavním cílem této diplomové práce je srovnání a analýza dvou knih – <i>Their Eyes Were Watching God</i> od Zory Neale Hurston a <i>Quicksand</i> od Nella Larsen, které vznikly v období Harlemské renesance. V dalších kapitolách se diplomová práce zabývá samotným obdobím Harlemské renesance a také tím, jak se dají anglické knihy efektivně využít při výuce cizího jazyka.
<b>Klíčová slova:</b>	Zora Neale Hurston, Nella Larsen, <i>Their Eyes Were Watching God</i> , <i>Quicksand</i> , Harlemská renesance, hnutí New Negro, afro-americká literatura, analýza, srovnání
<b>Anotace v angličtině:</b>	The main objective of this diploma thesis is the comparison and analysis of two novels - <i>Their Eyes Were Watching God</i> by Zora Neale Hurston and <i>Quicksand</i> by Nella Larsen which were written in the period of the Harlem Renaissance. In other chapters, the thesis deals with the period of the Harlem renaissance itself. It also focuses on how can be English books effectively used in a foreign language teaching.
<b>Klíčová slova v angličtině:</b>	Zora Neale Hurston, Nella Larsen, <i>Their Eyes Were Watching God</i> , Harlem Renaissance, New Negro Movement, Afro-American Literature, analysis, comparison
<b>Přílohy vázané v práci:</b>	Příloha č.1 – Příprava na hodinu 1 ( <i>Their Eyes Were Watching God</i> ) Příloha č.2 – Příprava na hodinu 1 (Texty) Příloha č.3 – Příprava na hodinu 2 ( <i>Quicksand</i> ) Příloha č.4 – Příprava na hodinu 2 (Texty)
<b>Rozsah práce:</b>	77 s., 10 s. příloh
<b>Jazyk práce:</b>	AJ