Analyzing "Drenched in Light" by Zora Neale Hurston

Directions: As you read and annotate, consider the story as an allegory for the struggles of the artist during the Harlem Renaissance as revealed in Langston Hughes’s “The Negro and the Racial Mountain” as well as the film. You will recall that in an allegory, the characters assume symbolic roles. What do Isis, Grandma Potts and Helen represent? What points about the artist’s struggle for cultural acceptance does Hurston convey through her story? How do you know? Using these questions to guide your analysis will help you develop worthy level 2 and 3 questions.

1. What is the meaning of the title?
2. Isis is the name of the Egyptian goddess of fertility. Why is this significant?
3. Discuss Isis' role in the story. Why do you think she is referred to as "the joyful"?
4. What do the white cattlemen represent?
5. What does the grandmother represent?
6. "So youse whistlin' in mah face, huh!" (Grandma). Interpret.
7. "She was picturing herself gazing over the edge of the world into the abyss…” Interpret.
8. What is the significance of the shaving incident?
9. "She couldn't dance at the carnival. Her dress was torn and dirty." Interpret.
10. What does the red tablecloth symbolize?
11. "Her woe grew attractive" is an allusion. To what is Hurston alluding?
12. What is the effect of this allusion: “Isis got up and waded in the water”?
13. What is the significance of Isis' inability to drown herself?
14. Discuss: “She was invited to a seat beside the driver.”
15. What does “the horizon” symbolize? Why does Isis share her dreams with the kind lady? Why is that significant?
16. The grandmother misinterprets Isis' motives for attempting to shave her. What does this misinterpretation represent?
17. Explain the significance of paying the grandmother five dollars for a one dollar tablecloth.

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18. "I want brightness and this Isis is joy itself, why she's drenched in light." Interpret.


20. What is significant about Isis "adopting" Helen?

21. "I want a little of her sunshine to soak into my soul. I need it." Interpret.

22. Define the roles of the protagonist and the antagonist in the story.

23. Consider "Drenched in Light" as an allegory representing the Harlem Renaissance. Describe the abstract concepts the characters portray.