

Dust Tracks on a Road Study Guide

Dust Tracks on a Road by Zora Neale Hurston

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Plot Summary

This is an autobiography of a highly articulate African-American woman. She is the daughter of the Mayor of an "all Negro" town; this was a political and social intentional experiment. There was support for the endeavor from the white community; the author carefully and honestly acknowledges this. She has two married parents to start out with, but during her childhood her mother dies. When her father remarries, there is a great deal of trouble as her stepmother does not truly embrace the children. The remarriage is destroyed when Zora wins a brawl with her stepmother and to the woman's horror, Zora's father does not intervene. The woman leaves him after that. After this event, the man's children are somewhat scattered, though not entirely lost. They are somewhat forced to make their way prematurely in the world.

Zora is an African-American woman who was born at the very end of the 19th century. She was quite gifted, a talented writer capable of writing stories that others thought impossible due to her racial heritage. Despite this, her financial and familial situations thwarted her progress. She had to leave school and work from age 14 -19 and as a consequence completed secondary school when a grown woman. Her gifts and talents are largely stifled by lack of education for many years, but somehow allies find her and help get her on the road to success. She spends years traveling and chronicling African-American folk-tales. First she heads to Alabama, then to New Orleans, then finally on to Nassau, in the Bahamas. These travels give her broad experience in the many types of trials and travails faced by African-Americans in her era. In spite of this, however, her stories did not tend towards the political in tone. She does give her opinions and feelings about race relations, both within and without the African-American community, but that is not her focus.

This story traces her life from its humble beginnings all the way to her prominence as a figure in the Harlem Renaissance.



Book 1, Dust Tracks on a Road : Chapter 1, The Beginning

Book 1, Dust Tracks on a Road : Chapter 1, The Beginning Summary and Analysis

This summary chapter covers the introductory materials and the first 5 chapters of the book. The first is My Birthplace. In this chapter Zora explains how Eatonville developed after the end of the American Civil War. It was founded by a group of powerful African-Americans who had fought as part of the Union military during the Civil War. They had gone to Brazil to found a colony but had turned back. Later on, with support from within and also from some white colleagues and friends, they were able to enact this plan in a new form - that of all African-American Eatonville, Florida. Eatonville is the sister city to Maitland. The author points out that the white people in Maitland were very friendly and supportive and that the two towns are excellent terms with one another. Obviously, this makes a big difference.

In chapter 2, My Folks, the author describes how it is that her parents came together. Her mother was a girl in Eatonville, and her father was an older immigrant mulatto. Zora's mother maiden name was Potts. Mulatto just means having both "black and white" parentage. Such people are light by African-American standards and dark with often tightly curled haired by 'white' or Caucasian standards. John Hurston who became Zora's father had one of the special assets that can emerge from such a combination - gorgeous green eyes. He spent months showing his interest and making himself known to her. The author describes her mother as having had no initial interest in her father. Her mother eventually gave in to her suitor, paradoxically believing that this would lead to her being freed from him through something - perhaps rejection and divorce. Zora explains that her family up to that point were opposed to the marriage. They were relatively refined Eatonville people whereas John was an "over-the-creek-nigger" meaning that as far as they could tell he was a migrant farm worker. The author writes that her mother believed she could get rid of this man by yielding to him, at least initially. This did not work, as Zora's parents spent the rest of their lives together. They did have conflicts about sexual fidelity, including an incident where Zora went after her man with an axe over her shoulder. In another case, Zora reports that her father once or twice threatened her mother that he would kill her - literally, if she did or attempted to leave/abandon him.



Book 1, Dust Tracks on the Road : Chapter 2, I Get Born & The Inside Search

Book 1, Dust Tracks on the Road : Chapter 2, I Get Born & The Inside Search Summary and Analysis

In chapter 3, I Get Born, Zora describes the exceptionally challenging day her mother had the day she was born. Her mother ended up mostly on her own, much more so than she should have been. In fact, she had a midwife on call, but the woman ended up caught without her when labor struck. A white man turned up who was neither a stranger nor an exceptionally well-known entity. He provided her with help as best he could, including washing the baby, cutting the umbilical cord and making baby and mother able to stay together. This community member did not have a large role in the rest of their lives; but it is evidently incredibly important that he cared enough to help the Negro lady having the baby when he came across something of this kind. This man turns out to be important. He takes an interest in the girl. Zora calls his attitude proprietary. Never out of line, this older white man became something after the manner of an Uncle to Zora during her youth.

The author begins chapter 4, The Inside Search, by explaining the reality of how children make adults think by asking so many questions. This forces or at least pressures adults into considering what they do and do not know, and why they think they know what they do. This is so powerful in what it does to the adult mind that many flee from this by getting a bit aggressive with the children and shooing them away. Zora was this way herself, and writes that it made her "a crow in a pigeon's nest." The white man who helped her mother give birth to her, has taken a proprietary interest. He includes her as a little friend, takes her fishing and teaches her things.

The author's ability to write with vivid metaphors shows during this chapter. The anecdotes she selects to share with the readers are rich and detailed, albeit rather brief. One of these is about her having been intimate with the Moon. Another is about having been "a crow in a pigeon's nest" at home. She uses this to describe having been a very curious young girl, who frequently asked questions. She noticed how much this made the others uncomfortable. So far, the autobiography is flowing smoothly. She is clear about the racial differences. She does an excellent job of showing good and bad points about this. She readily admits that one of the reasons for her attitude towards white people is the direct result of generalized good experiences with them. For readers of any race or subgroup within American culture, this is quite helpful. For those from a different background, the author does a fantastic job of making her situation and cultural context clear for the readers.



Chapter 3, Figure Wandering (cs. 5 & 6 inclusive)

Chapter 3, Figure Wandering (cs. 5 & 6 inclusive) Summary and Analysis

In *Figure and Fancy*, chapter 5, she begins by noting that Joe Clark, who is the Mayor of Eatonville, owns and runs a store as well as being the Mayor of an all "Negro" town in Florida. The area in front of the store was known as Joe Clark's porch. Zora explains that it was a cultural vantage point onto the town and upon the adult world from her juvenile perspective. Everything, ranging from gossip to being able to tell a man was a proud husband who provided well for his wife, turning over his income to her control to how the whole community could tell a man who was cheating on his wife by who else he spent money on. Women's reputations were openly discussed and described, although typically through allusion and idiom. She explains that her parents did not try to break her spirit. Even so, she recognized that she was difficult at times, and her parents may have felt a bit 'tried' to remain patient with her. Part of this was that the trees and other forces of nature spoke with her. Later on, the author describes Florida's wildlife. The truth was, that between alligators, poison snakes and jealous husbands, Florida could be a dangerous place. At the same time, given this atmosphere, it turned out it was quite possible to resolve many a difficulty without going to court. In this regard, Zora informs readers that fist fights, for example, were not to be taken to the law. This became clear when someone did take such a case to trial, and the adults in her community generally frowned upon that course of action.

Chapter 6, titled *Wandering*, begins with Zora describing how old spites continued to influence her relatives. Zora's mother returned to visit her mother, preserving her during the final illness of her lifetime. Zora flashes back on this for readers so that they will understand what happened. Zora's mother is in what may well be a final illness. Grandmother still had not forgiven Zora's mother for marrying John Hurston. There was a lot of forgiveness, but it was not complete. Jesus Christ indicated something Zora seems to agree with as she writes in this chapter - simply, that the real solution would have been complete and total forgiveness. The inheritance was directly affected by this behavior - Grandma didn't give Zora's mother the same claim to her property there in Eatonville that she would have if Zora had someone else as her husband.



Chapter 4, Jacksonville & Railroad (cs 7 & 8 incl)

Chapter 4, Jacksonville & Railroad (cs 7 & 8 incl) Summary and Analysis

Chapter 7, Jacksonville, opens with Zora following her mother's early death. Her father, the widower, has succeeded in finding a new wife. The trouble is that the new wife doesn't want her husband's children much, but does want the husband. The eldest girl has a terrible time with the woman because of this. The new stepmother is jealous of Sarah's connection with her father. The father is giving in to the wishes of his new wife - who he probably very much needs, and the children are dissatisfied generally. The eldest girl is old enough to flee the situation by going and marrying young, which she does. Zora has explained in earlier chapters that one quality she noticed about herself growing up was that she was a bit rough. This led to her playing together with boys, although that was frowned upon. That trait turns up in this chapter when she describes how she trounced her stepmother in an altercation years after her sister Sarah had left the new blended family. Her father refused to back up his wife -the stepmother for one of the first times ever. This meant that Zora really won the fight. That actually ended the marriage; the stepmother quit after that. Zora decides that she is going to marry President Collier but not until she has grown up. A financial difficulty causes her to gain some work experience at the school and later on she is forced to leave it. The chapter ends as she shows how her father's deception to the new wife caused a dramatic confrontation between she and his children. Ultimately, the matter ends with everyone leaving home. The children move out before they are full grown.

Early on in chapter 8, entitled Back Stage and the Railroad, Zora faces the financial hardships and takes a proactive stance. She starts looking for work so that she can financially support herself, but as she is only 14 years old she runs into difficulties. When she writes her autobiography she knows that she was a bit young to try this. It is also very clear from the way older people reacted to her, how much they felt she was too young to work. She finds work and is trained to clean and to change beds. This somehow naturally progresses into her taking care of children. She is very playful and does a great job. So much so, in fact, that when the boss attempts to fire her, the children prevent this. Eventually, she is fired for no discernible reason. She surmises that the real issue was the man's need to keep his wife. Some married white guy and boss hits on her. She dodges him successfully but ends up unemployed. Two weeks later she learns that he found another other woman with whom to run off, abandoning his wife and their children by doing so.



Chapter 5, Back Stage (c. 8)

Chapter 5, Back Stage (c. 8) Summary and Analysis

Zora's life reaches a dramatic turning point during this chapter. After having spent some time with her brother and his wife, she finds work with a new crowd. These people are thespians. She becomes servant to an older white woman - her new boss is actually also quite young, but adult rather than adolescent. The pay is a drastic improvement at \$10 per week plus room and board. Zora is elated, as is the other woman. This is a Gilbert & Sullivan operatic troupe. Zora writes about how she is teased extensively, but without malice as part of the process of her becoming accepted into the group. She repeatedly assures readers that she was able to tell that the others were not being malicious and passing it off as if they were only joking, but really were only teasing. Every reader who has been teased both ways know what an important distinction this really is. Zora is accepted by the group. This is her initiation into a realm in which she is 'the Negro' amongst whites. She explains to readers a cultural difference. She is a Southerner, and the majority of her people are not bookish. She explains that metaphors, simile and name-calling are all art forms where she comes from. The others were all Yankees, and this allowed her to charm them with her Southern ways. She then goes on to tell about how she developed an important part by writing comical notices on what the others termed a call-board.

Later, she also provides details of a drama within this production company that involved a woman who did take up with the theatre manager. The others viewed this as a form of betrayal. One strange note about Zora emerges here. When she goes to the theatre company she sort of runs away from home. She reports that once hired, she does not dare go back to her brother. She is afraid that her married brother will keep her with him. If that happens, her opportunity will be lost. To avoid that, she doesn't even go back. This might well seem understandably bizarre and not necessarily right in relation to how this means she is treating her brother, his wife and the children she has been caring for. The chapter ends with Zora returning to school. She reports that she feels at times secure and other times trepidation. This is because she had been lonely before she met up with the Gilbert & Sullivan opera company, and for a year and a half had been truly happy and at peace with these people although she had missed school. She notes she had met people who tried to fill career failure up with love, and others who tried to fill the void for love with their careers as well as those who found the right balance of the two.



Chapter 6, School Again (c. 9) - Part 1

Chapter 6, School Again (c. 9) - Part 1 Summary and Analysis

One of the features that Zora has mentioned during the preceding chapters is that she wanted more school and more books. She was forced to leave school, and so far her working life had not presented her with many opportunities to engage in more studious behaviors. She had acquired at least some job skills and work experience. So far she has not provided information about her physical appearance very many times directly. Her female perspective shows clearly when she obviously does not necessarily realize that a man is sexually attracted to her, although there are also occurrences when she is well aware that that is what it is. The author has a way of using language that is powerful. She does use complex words along with a lot of clear, simple language that is well used and put together quite nicely. By this point in the book, she is telling her life story extremely well, in a highly engaging way. Readers develop a sense of this young lady's personality. She can be kind and gentle; she is also surprisingly rough and tough. This is natural to her nature but it isn't the best fit for gender role expectations of her era and place. She is very playful and also studious. Finances have completely disrupted her education. She is very bright and by nature quite bookish. Because of this, she wants more school. Even though she has not enjoyed every minute of it, when forced out of school she misses it a great deal. She feels a profound lack of appreciation for her curiosity and tendencies towards literacy and book learning within the general environment of her life. However, she is not entirely without support on this issue. One of her brothers actually takes her in, and communicates to her his intention to help her to get more education. This has caused her to still need to finish high school while already a grown woman. It has everything to do with money and nothing to do with intelligence.

In chapter 9 of the book, Zora finally returns to school. She needs and receives help with the funding so that she can have a place to live and enough to eat and tuition covered. She is able to make friends despite her financial troubles. By the time she arrives at the end, the others assure her that she must attend the most prestigious Negro college in the country, Howard. She is very popular at Howard. She describes the strange racial conditions including a peculiar incident where a Negro man asked to be served by a barber who hired Howard Negroes to work for him whenever he could but did not cut Negro hair. There were other cases where Zora says, upon reflection, she realized that there was Jim Crow - racial hierarchy and segregation laws, and that there were some cases where she was somehow 'caught' by these, and ended up sanctioning them against her own wishes really. She went on to Barnard where she was also well-liked.



Chapter 7, School Again (c. 10) - Part 2

Chapter 7, School Again (c. 10) - Part 2 Summary and Analysis

During chapter 9, at Barnard, Zora's life begins to transform. This time, it is her work life. Her work and her education begin to blend. After having come to adore a number of her professors, including the one that all the students love so much they call him Papa, one of her men professors helps her greatly. Here's how. Dr. Boas finds a fellowship, and effectively assigns a project to her student Zora, funding and project dished out together. Zora is pleased. Here, she heads South to gather folklore - this work is a far cry from tucking in the corners of beds as she had first learned to do in order to earn money. This was to begin as soon as she finished Barnard. She had both male and female professors. By this time, she had won one award for a short fiction story which was published in a small magazine. Once school is done, she reunites with relatives for the first time in many years. Two of her brothers were doing well. They were reasonably smart, successful fellows with both good working lives and cheerful personal lives. She writes of how joyful she was to go back to the South.

Chapter 10 starts out, "Research is formalized curiosity," (p. 143). She writes of her false start to gather folk tales; she writes that the whole problem was her approach. She asked people directly for folk tales and got little further than nowhere. Saddened, she went back to Dr. Papa Boas who was less disappointed in her than she believed him to be. Then she went back to try her hand to the task again. This time, she writes about Polk County. This is a place that was rather lawless. The industrialists were protective of anyone who would do the work, even if that meant fending off the law to keep them on the job. This was a place where those who worked in the phosphate mines to make fertilizer for far away farm fields would sometimes find the most astounding relics of Earth's history. She explains how shark's teeth and other literally gargantuan bones were found, now and again, amongst the ore of the phosphate deep beneath the surface, giving the workers a bold lesson in history. She then writes of dancing and fighting in Polk County. Here, she describes an argument between a whore and a prostitute. The prostitute thinks the whore is a shame and an idiot, and declares boldly and proudly how she is independent and makes money from her sexual activity whereas the other woman just has sex but doesn't get paid. Zora writes about how such women can set upon each other with switch-blade knives as well as words. Seeing as Zora is a good fighter, this should not be underrated. "De white mens and de nigger women is running this thing" (p. 151).



Chapter 8, Research (c. 10) - Part 3

Chapter 8, Research (c. 10) - Part 3 Summary and Analysis

Zora introduces readers to a realm that some will recognize but to others it will seem mythical and archetypal. Others will find it to be downright scary. There was a woman in this place known as Big Sweet. She was actually really nice, and it so happened that she was also tough. So tough, in fact, that the others claimed that she had killed another human adult and had even done this more than once. Still, everyone said that it really was only that she had been 'messed with' and that she never started trouble with people. People liked her; she was popular. Zora befriended her and credits Big Sweet with saving her life later on in regards to another woman. Lucy was the other woman's name. These women went so far as to fight with weapons and weren't averse to fighting all the way until somebody was dead. Zora writes that situations fortunately often did not go anywhere near so far as that, but they did often enough that Zora was thankful and relieved when Big Sweet assured her of protection. This came up when Lucy determined to 'get her.' Big Sweet went around with her for weeks to guard her from Lucy, and it worked. Lucy, however, managed to find an occasion when Big Sweet appeared to be absent - luckily, in truth she was there. The scene turned into a larger fight, including plenty of women and men as well. Big Sweet urged Zora to run away from this battle. Zora explains to readers that she took this advice to heart and went to New Orleans: her departure began at that moment.

The author then informs readers about how she delved into 'Hoodoo' and sympathetic magic while in New Orleans, including boiling the corpse of a black cat inside of a magic circle. She proceeds to Nassau, in the Bahamas. Her work progresses very well there. Much of what she finds spreads and gains tremendous popularity afterward. While there, she survives the 1929 hurricane. She writes that it was 5 days of terror, and afterward there were dead bodies in the streets - both human and animal and that the stench of their decay was horrific. She met Leon Walter Young there - while he was a legislator. Leon Walter Young was a Negro who did not cow-tow to either the mulattoes or to the white folks. Zora describes him as well read but not formally educated. Zora explains how Walton Young, who's re-election was as good as granted after 21 years in office, set up an opponent to fail against him. Instead, Leon Walter Young cultivated a new, white delegate to run another part of the Bahamas. He was able to place his own "stooge" right in there with the opponent Botts. This was in part, thanks to inside information about some secretive and sneaky doings conducted on both sides. Young had been famous, or notorious already for having run off a Governor.



Chapter 9, Books & People

Chapter 9, Books & People Summary and Analysis

Chapter 11, *Books and Things*, opens with the author explaining that she has written a few short stories and has the inkling for a whole book. She is skittish about doing this, especially since she doesn't want to write about "the Race Problem" (p. 171). She informs readers that writing about race is the latest cultural trend. Her attitude towards this does show in her book. When racial issues assert themselves undeniably, then she takes them up. Otherwise she doesn't, because that isn't her main interest and she doesn't even want it to be an issue, nor does she go out of her way to make an issue of it. She wrote *Jonah's Gourd Vine*, as her first full length book. She believes that she was secretly helped as well as having been overtly assisted by others in order for this project to make it into publication. One of her short fiction stories was published in a magazine. One of her passions as a writer is to determine and to express peoples' motivations, so that the cause and effect relationships can be clearly established for events. There was drama and tension for her regarding getting her manuscript typed up and to the publisher due to her funding concerns. She has grown increasingly accustomed to doing bigger things - one consequence of her research is that she puts on a show that earns enough money to cover her back rent. She has a day wherein there is financial drama going in both directions. She earns enough money to catch up on her rent but is thrown out before she can pay it. She is wired by a publisher and offered hundreds of dollars in an era when 50 cents is enough for one grown woman to have groceries for a whole week. She accepts her first book contract from a publisher - which is different from getting other kinds of freelance writing contracts. The chapter ends with her in California.

Chapter 12, *My People! My People!*, begins as she describes various internal class distinctions within the Negro race. She writes of how educated people tend to balk at the raucous people but doesn't say that white people have a virtually identical differentiation amongst themselves as well. She explains that "My people! My people!" is a common phrase amongst African-Americans of her region. Usually, it is what someone says when rather embarrassed by the behavior of others who have the same color skin. It is a token of frustration. She concludes the chapter by explaining that for all her searching, she has only found that there is no actual 'the Negro' in the sense of a quintessential type, representing the entire race. In the meantime, she writes about "the white man" who is equally ephemeral, but just as easy to describe by the color of his skin. Here, "he" includes the women and children of the race.



Chapter 10, Two Women

Chapter 10, Two Women Summary and Analysis

This summary chapter covers just one chapter of the book. This is about two women friends. By this time in the book, Zora has grown accustomed to greater things. She has taken on projects which may have seemed terrifying or impossible earlier on in her education and development. One of the women Zora very actively sets out to meet. This is Ethel Waters. She tries more than one way to meet Ethel after she has heard of her. She uses letters as one means, but Ethel just ignores her efforts. Later, Ethel is invited to a party. Those attending are all actually fairly prominent socially - 'society people' in at least some sense. Once the two actually get to conversing it turns out that Zora is right - they discover that they get along quite well. The other's name is Fanny Hurst. Fanny Hurst comes off as younger than she is. She is both playful and serious. She mildly astounds Zora because of her ability to switch back and forth from upbeat, light and playful to quite serious and then back again. She is found amongst professional writers. Fanny was an adult only child, who would occasionally play at being a guest to her home. This may or may not have been an enactment of 'being a friend to herself.' On another occasion she spontaneously brought Zora with her across hundreds of miles to the Niagara Falls. This was her reaction to the knowledge that Zora had not ever been to the Niagara Falls. Zora reports that their journey was quite enjoyable and that she in fact liked going and experiencing them live and in person.

Ethel Waters is a bit different from this. She became known to Zora through her profession. She was an excellent singer, but terrified at first, to perform before the others. Zora was in the position to be a regular 'fan' but had a feeling about the two of them that they would do well to be friends with one another. Whatever readers might assume for why she was first ignored, and later accepted by Ethel there were specific results. Ethel Waters was a sensitive soul, tending towards shyness. Zora writes that in reality, she needed reassurance that she was actually really wanted before she could feel secure enough to open up to another. Zora goes on to tell readers that once this occurred, Ethel was a fabulous friend to have. The author describes both of these friendships as holding great importance to her. The language she uses is colorful without excess. For women readers, this is a reminder of how meaningful this type of relationship is. For men, it is a variant take on the role of other women in the life of any main woman of their own experience. This chapter is quite brief.



Chapter 11, Love

Chapter 11, Love Summary and Analysis

This chapter is the 14th in the book. Here, our heroine discusses her own love life. Her experiences are unique, profound and of course colored by time, place and generation. She is one of the women for whom being found attractive became a relatively normal part of adulthood. She writes of how her romantic sense developed. Readers may point to a time in their own lives when they had this same type of feeling, either when they were very young, or in limited cases or whatever. She would take a shine to a man, often an older grown man. She writes that she might watch him pass by her home and that often he was somehow two-timing her in the sense that he had a real girlfriend, her own innocent dreams and feelings being unknown to him. Often enough, her feelings would pass, especially if the man offended her in some way. Well, granted all that preliminary work, readers may recall how in an earlier chapter, while she was a school girl she had some tentative literary affair with the President of her school. In that case, it appeared that she wasn't actually just imagining things. Nevertheless, probably for the best, this relationship was interfered with and brought to a halt. No explanation is provided to readers of the grown man's intentions or views. Perhaps he just thought she was cute and was innocent enough in his proceedings, or perhaps he was too much 'man the predator' at least as far as grown women are concerned. It is often the province of grown women to guard budding girls, but luckily there are numerous full grown men who are equally safe and protective rather than being any danger to the adolescents. Here, it is only after her career has actually begun to really manifest that her love life comes out of dormancy.

After that she moves on to share with readers about a man known only as P.M.P. He was a big, handsome man. Her career was coming along, still in its earlier phases of growth. This was a powerful love, and proved to be a rude test of her will and her nature, and his as well. What was rude is that they loved each other very much and truly. However, he was a wedge between her and her career. Fortunately for all of her readers and fans, she was not willing to give this up. This forced she and P.M.P. apart. As for himself, he found her support of his working life to be a treasured necessity even though he suffered from wanting to make her give up her work. Zora is not resentful about this. She describes it in her autobiography as being 'his manliness' which she also found very attractive. His desire to do for her, and to provide caused this trouble.



Chapter 12, Religion (c. 15)

Chapter 12, Religion (c. 15) Summary and Analysis

The author explains that her father was a high quality preacher. She describes for readers his revivals. These were quite dramatic. It seems that he was one of those who gave the audience a passionate and personal view of the magma layer of the planet only he taught everyone that it was Hell and was the place for the unrepentant sinners but Zora never informs readers that her father acknowledged that his vision of Hell was a reasonably accurate description of how fiery molten lava is, and how much molten rock fire there really is as part of the Earth. Zora explains that her father's revivals often ran for two weeks at a time. Usually, she reports, he was able to lead 75 people through this process each time.

She admits that there is some kind of problem, for her in learning all about forgiveness through Jesus Christ only to have it followed up with exhortations about and judgmental attitudes from the ministry who tell everyone how much they are sinners. She observes that this seems either out of order, or that something else about it is 'strange.' She notes that even though this is the case, her father was expert at getting others to repent. She then goes on to discuss American politics briefly, as part of a larger examination of religion in Europe. She writes of the Roosevelts, who she admired greatly.

Zora continues her adept phrasing and use of the language during this chapter of the autobiography. She has explained during the story that Southerners of her time use colorful metaphors as the norm. She learned that this helped her creativity a lot. She later learned, from exposure to white culture that this was not typical, at least not amongst Yankees. Zora tells her true life story clearly and with plenty of artistic flair. Chapter 12 is rather short. She moves through it by topic. By the end of the chapter readers have a renewed sense of her politics and of her view of religion. She likes religion but feels that preachers, like their parishioners can be excessive in their zeal to be corrective and punitive towards others. By the time the book has reached this point, the author is also developing rather well in her career. Tasks which used to seem impossible, have become possible.



Chapter 13, Looking Things Over (c. 16)

Chapter 13, Looking Things Over (c. 16) Summary and Analysis

This is the final normal chapter of the autobiography. She addresses racial issues but not because it is a strong personal interest. Rather, she does this only because it comes up. She is glad that she lives decades and even a century after the end of slavery. In earlier chapters, she discussed the reality that the bulk of Africans who were sold into slavery were captured and sold off by other Africans. Here, the difference was far from based on skin color. Tribal differences were found other ways, the more subtle distinctions for determining who is one of 'us' and who is one of 'them,' the enemy. By the time the book reaches this point she has shown both how well free Negroes have been doing, and has shown how Jim Crow continued in its effect. Zora has received mixed messages about her status. She is recognized as being exceptionally gifted, and as a definitively free Negro woman. She is also given messages to yield to segregation and to Jim Crow in many places. She was also told that because of this she was taught not to expect to have as many things - these were viewed or described more in terms of being 'white man's things' but as an American it amounted to a shunning of wealth. Still, prestige was permitted her and this she was granted. She hates slavery and is very thankful to be living a few generations after its end. She concludes with an affirmation of those who share her color. This isn't so much an effort to escape other races but simply to affirm her affection for her own people.

She admits that great warriors are described as such because they went and took things from other people. They also brought back goods for people. This made those who received happy. "I do not visualize the moon dripping down in blood, nor the sun batting his fiery eyes and laying down in the cradle of eternity" (p. 228). This portion of a sentence is a perfect example of the author's ability to write vividly. This precious level of writing continues throughout the book. The final sentence of the work is very friendly, "Maybe all of us who do not have the good fortune to meet, or meet again in this world, will meet at a barbecue" (p. 232).

There is an appendix after this in the body of the text. This itself is further subdivided into sections. One of these is called My People! My People! The other is The Inside Light - Being A Salute to Friendship, Concert, and the Afterward.



Characters

Zora Neale Hurston

This is the author and subject of the book. She is an African-American born at the tail end of the 19th century who lived most of her life as a 20th century figure. She is famous for having written a number of high quality books during her adult life.

Zora is one of the earliest generations of genuinely free American Negroes. Here, the term Negro is used the same way that 'black' and African-American are used in more contemporary language. Born to an ambitious and able father from humble beginnings and a mysterious mother from a land-owning family of means, Zora is a gifted girl. Others become aware of this during her childhood. Her school experiences go well. However, disruption in her home life in the death of her mother and her father's effort at remarriage puts an end to her schooling. Well, this 'end' turns out merely to be a delay. She manages to get back to school. Thanks to this, along with her willingness to work, she grows up into quite a successful woman - a definite exemplar for African-Americans and for women in particular.

Zora learns about work both by humbling herself, and by seizing opportunities and by allowing others to help her. She is peculiar in that due to her hypersensitivities she at times changes her situation in a way that comes to some of the others in her life as a bit of a shock. She runs to certain things, but takes off in secret from others. She only does this because she is afraid that she will be stopped or will lose her nerve otherwise. This occurs more than once during her life story, and is often associated with taking a new job.

John Hurston

This is actually the man who turns out to be Zora's father, among other things. He was a plantation mulatto who had his own agenda. He left one location and tried settling near Eatonville, Florida, in the hopes of fulfilling at least some of his life's dreams. He was a healthy, strong man. Zora writes that 'he would have fetched a high price in slavery days' due to his being of high quality.

John Hurston turned out to be right in his ambitions. Although he had started out his adult life as a 'plantation Negro' - a farm hand, a field worker before he died he had gone so far as to serve as the Mayor of Eatonville. He did this more than once. This does not happen to the majority of people and serves retrospectively as proof positive that he was right about himself - in that it really was OK that he was ambitious.

This man had a number of jobs. He had two wives. The first is the one with whom he had children. To her, he succeeded in remaining attached, but not without some drama on both sides of the relationship. He also had some children. Amongst them was little Zora. After his wife Lucy died, perhaps prematurely, he tried to remarry. It did not work



long. Without their mother's living presence, the family was severely changed. The children were often enemies to his new wife. Ultimately, his daughter Zora fought and won a physical battle over a piece of the first wife's furnishings. This had exposed some of his dishonesty to his new wife, and his defense of his own daughter to his new wife led to the dissolution of his second marriage.

Carrie Roberts

She appears in the fourth chapter. There is a relevant anecdote. It involves the nature of subjectivity and objectivity, and that social distance in between. Here, Zora makes the decision to share information. In this case, it proves disastrous, at least initially. Zora had an intimate friendship with the Moon; they used to play together whenever Zora ran around outdoors the Moon would follow her around. Carrie Roberts laughed at her, and scorned her. The two set up a rivalry, and then ran a jealous race outside to test - which of them does the Moon really love, or love best? Carrie Roberts, although she could have been gentler and more tactful about it, introduced to Zora the objective nature of the Moon's relationship to everyone.

Matilda Clark

This is one of the girls who was a playmate of Zora's. She is one of the Moon's many loves. Zora enjoyed having a relationship with Matilda but felt hurt and jealous that the Moon itself didn't love only Zora, but also followed Matilda Clark. This is explained in chapter 4 of the book.

Julia Mosley

This is another girl who Zora knew during early childhood. It turned out that she had her own relationship with the Moon. Zora felt jealous and bizarre now that she knew that she wasn't the Moon's only and favorite girl. This is described in chapter 4, along with a small group of other playmates.

Oscar Miller

This boy was one of Zora's playmates. He is another person who she realized the Moon might well love in addition to herself. This comes out during chapter 4, as part of a rather emotionally painful development and change in her perception of her own private relationship with the Moon that everyone knows.

Teedy Miller

This is another playmate of Zora's. Teedy is the last in her list of childhood friends whom she suspected of also having a friendly relationship with the Moon. As such, Teedy was

one of those of whom she suffered from jealousy and sorrow about, until she had made her adjustment to the reality that she was not the only intimate friend of the Moon's. This occurs in chapter 4.

Maya Angelou

This is one of the most popular contemporary authors of African-American persuasion. Her work is a case where racial and cultural aspects of 'her America' are a necessary integration. She has provided the autobiography with a brief introduction.

The only way that Maya appears in this entire book is in her role as the author of the Introduction. Maya Angelou is most famous for being a popular poetess. This is not even mentioned in the book. Her other main function is to support the growing tradition of female achievement in American society, and especially African-American women in particular.



Objects/Places

The Moon

This is the planet's partner - the one and only natural satellite. The Moon is first mentioned as one of Zora's very best friends, with whom she played a game. She noticed they were friends because the Moon followed her around when she played outside. The Moon is mentioned in chapter 1.

Chinaberry tree

This tree is mentioned in the first chapter. This type of tree edged the front gate of Zora's childhood home. Her perception of the world was so limited at that time, that she felt that if she went out from the house and yard, which she viewed as the center of the universe, then she had a decent chance of finding the 'end of the world.' She and one of her girl playmates went ahead and decided to venture forth and find the end of the world.

The End of the World

This appears in the fourth chapter of the autobiography. It is a mysterious location and becomes the destination for an adventurous journey. Zora aims to go and find it.

Eatonville, Florida

This is Zora's home town. It was an intentional community organized, led and run by African-Americans, commonly called Negroes at the time when the events took place. Zora was actually a daughter of the Mayor of Eatonville, August 18, 1886 this town received its incorporation. It is named after Captain Eaton because when Joe Clarke kept talking about founding a Negro town to be the 'twin city' for white Maitland, Captain Eaton believed they could do it. This, even though many others balked at the idea. This made such a difference, and was so important to making it happen that the town is named after him.

Maitland, Florida

Maitland, Florida began as an interracial town where the Emancipation movement had won great favor amongst the locals. They included 'Negroes' - as African-Americans were then called, amongst their public officials. The idea was developed to found a sister city to Maitland as an experiment in Negro leadership and independence. There was white support on this issue. To understand Maitland people have to understand that this took place on extremely friendly terms. Maitland and Eatonville are buddies.



Jasmine bushes

This is a flowering shrubbery mentioned in chapter 2. They are mentioned in the context of being the decor for the front lawn of the author's childhood home.

Palmettoes

These are mentioned in chapter 4 as one of the decorative plants around. They are defined as a hiding place that she uses when she goes to secretly meet her friend Carrie Roberts so that they can journey to the end of the world that day.

Pigeon's Nest

This is both what it actually is and is a metaphor for something else. This is the type of nest made by pigeons and used by a pigeon family unit as a home. Babies are usually kept here until they mature enough to make their own way as adults. This is used as a metaphor for Zora's home, during her childhood. It is referred to as a place where one aspect of the way that she is caused trouble. This comes up at the very beginning of chapter 4.

Crow

Here, the crow is not an object in the usual sense. It comes up along with the pigeon's nest mentioned above. The real reason for this is that the bird signifies a metaphorical symbol. This is no pigeon, but for some reason there was one in a pigeon's nest. This is how Zora explains at the beginning of chapter 4, what she was like at home and how her constant inquisitive nature affected the atmosphere there at home.



Themes

Zora's Career

Zora was forced to work at a young age. She had to quit school in order to do so. She was only 14 years old at the time. She searched for options. Fortunately she was able to find some work, as someone's servant girl. She worked as a maid type of person. Later, she graduated into looking after children. Eventually, she became something along the lines of a governess and was able to resume her education. Her benefactors at the secondary school had to find her some paying work to enable her to be able to do this; luckily they did. One very fortunate thing about Zora is that she was well-liked everywhere she went, once people came to know her.

She manages to get an incredible position. Her job is very humble: she is a lady's maid. What makes this different is that her boss is a white woman who really likes her. Not only that, but the pay is much better: room & board plus \$10 per week. On top of that, this lady is part of a Gilbert & Sullivan operatic theatre troupe. She has to undergo some unofficial initiatory rites, but she passes these and the truth is that everyone likes her. She is rather happy amongst these people even though she very much misses school. She learns a lot here.

She was forced to have another gap in her education and resumed working for her living as a single woman. During this time, she received help from one of her brothers. Two of her brothers did quite well, having both good careers for 'smart guys' such as pharmacist, and also families - love lives, and friendships. One of them assists his sister, while he is married. He takes her in and has her work for them, helping to rear his children. He asks for Zora to be patient with him; one of his goals is to get her back into her education but it is going to take some time. She does the best she can and admits that she feels impatient about it.

She ends up finishing at Howard, and then going on to Barnard as a kind of "Negro light unto the world." While she continues to have financial troubles, others also continue to help look after her. At the tail end of this, she is nurtured along by a research fellowship. This leads into the first steps of her actual career. Years later, she has become adept enough to organize events, such as a live gospel production to spread African music and to write books. Further on from then, this same woman is able to write a number of published books that sell reasonably well. By her middle years she is well established enough that she is invited to parties where there are 'society people.' She continues to be well known today, 49 years after her death.

Race - Difference, Tolerance and Hierarchy

This female lived from 1891 -1960. She was born into an intentionally segregated, independent town created following the end of the American Civil War. This town, ruled



entirely by African-Americans in an era where they were commonly called Negro - this is the Spanish word for black, but pronounced in the American English manner, was on excellent terms with a paired up white controlled town called Maitland. The first Mayor Maitland was a Negro named Joe Clark. He soon became the Mayor of Eatonville, thanks to the vital support of Captain Eaton. There was good will and extensive trade between Maitland and Eatonville. The leaders of this town at its inception were champions of the Civil War Union Army's Negro troops. While this is a case where the racial difference was emphasized, the author emphatically clarifies that readers must understand the positive view taken. In this case, racial segregation was conducted with the best of intentions, rather like the first all women's schools, or when a sports team decides to use all women for the purpose of learning how to do it themselves and to show that they can. So both the whites and the Negroes of the region decided that Eatonville would be a 'real home' for the Negroes who had come to Florida where there was a great deal of work. This brought order to their previously somewhat haphazard settlements in the area as they immigrated to build Maitland.

The presentation of Zora is a little misleading or confusing. She was known or described as having lived in poverty. Well, often this was true by current middle-class white people standards. However, her father, John Hurston was instrumental in literally drafting the laws of the incorporated city of Eatonville and served three times as its Mayor. As such, there is no contradicting the reality that this makes his daughter a rather high class girl, if not entirely in wealth, then in local prestige. This counteracts the perceptions apt to emerge from the descriptions of her as 'being low born and living in poverty.' She was a rather high class girl, living in one of the poorest subgroups in American society, and was amongst the upper crust of that category.

The hierarchical attitude towards Negroes and that towards women shows in this book. She never makes being female an issue, but it is obvious that two of her brothers had educational and career success more easily and earlier than she did. She had many good experiences with white people enough that she felt more friendship with them than enmity or oppression. That being said, with the fresh victories of the Civil War just getting into play with her generation of born free American blacks, she felt liberated but often also reminded of the difference. At times these differences indicated that she was treated as if she were inferior, at least in rank, but to her good fortune, even when she was it was usually 'not too bad.' One example she uses is when she worked for a white barber. He would not accept Negro customers, in part because he had no idea of how to handle their hair, and he supported Jim Crow laws. However, even though he did, he consistently hired Negro college students which was an equally real sign of supporting Negro progress and freedom and higher education.

An American Experiment and its Aftermath

The foundation of the all Negro town of Eatonville, Florida was an intentional community and experiment in American history. Zora explains to readers that this was not the first Negro settlement but was the first fully incorporated town run by Negroes for Negroes. Joe Clark, the first Mayor, had served as Maitland's Mayor, the white men liked his



leadership so much that they used him first. During his time in office, the agreement to set up an all Negro town as a 'twin city' to Maitland came about. This was a case where segregation turned into an intentionally and voluntarily selected option. There was a great deal of de facto segregation as it was, along with some evident integration.

The whites of Maitland supported the Negro population a great deal through paying work opportunities. While the workers often remained poor by white standards, the clearing and building provided numerous new employment opportunities, including ones that were a step up from picking cotton on plantations. They gave a number of gifts for the creation of Eatonville, including a great many books for a local library. Trade between the two towns also flourished. Zora writes repeatedly of the depth of the friendship between Maitland and Eatonville in order to infuse readers with a complete understanding of what is involved.

The famous African-American poetess Maya Angelou has provided this book with an introduction. In it, she explains that John Hurston was thrice Mayor of Eatonville and that he wrote a number of the laws of that municipality. Many of the laws that Zora's father wrote or had a strong hand in writing were still in use in the 1990s when the edition of the book used to create this summary was published. The town still stands today and marks the nation with the imprint of the reality that Negro self-governance can happen here in America.

The majority of the aftermath of this experiment is not discussed in the book. However, some of it can be felt within the work. Some of the results are that Zora was empowered by the evident of this type of organization amongst her own color of people. This was a sign of great progress in the liberation of American Negroes. While she is also free to receive an education the majority of the author's life took place during segregated educational experiences. For those who have been born into integrated schools, integrated by gender and by color and to some extent also by economic classes, this marks a happy next order of progress from the author's era. To this day, the origins of Eatonville can serve as a reminder of what can be done within segregated conditions. Even if integration is preferred it is still good to know how much can be done without it. The sense of independence that fosters is also found today in African-American churches, and institutions of higher education. While the entire set of conditions has not been 'equalized,' and should not be equalized by destroying that which is more advanced, many successful gains have been made and the aftermath is primarily beneficial.

Style

Perspective

The author lived from 1891 - 1960. She came from Eatonville, Florida. Eatonville was founded as an all Negro town. It was not the first of its kind in that sense, but was the first to be fully incorporated. She was the daughter of a woman who's maiden name was Potts. Her mother's side owned land, and as such were rather high class Negroes. [Negro is used in this text, and therefore also in the summary. This is done for the sake of accuracy, not to offend anyone.] Lucy Ann Potts and her family were far from the poorest amongst white folks, though far from the richest. There were some other cultural differences caused by the racial distinction and its history.

Zora Neale Hurston was born to parents whose parents did not approve of the marriage. John Hurston, Zora's father, had migrated to Florida because he was ambitious. Her parents looked down on him, based on the circumstances he was living in when they met. He set his sights on her and decided to do what he could to have Lucy Ann for his wife. He was 6 years her senior, but during a phase of life when this difference is drastic: she was only 14 but he was already a 20 year old man. She was not even interested in him at first. In fact, when she did agree to marry him, she believed that she was just giving into him in order to find the means of getting rid of him as a suitor. This proved to be her fatal mistake, in that she remained his wife for the remainder of her life rather than getting rid of him or escaping him. Despite how this appears as an obvious mistake, and how true it was that Lucy Ann's parents disapproved of the marriage, it turned out to be fine. They had some drama and Lucy Ann died in her middle years rather than in old age but her strange immigrant husband turned out to be high quality enough to serve as Eatonville's Mayor three times and other events that indicated the truth of his ambitions and his claims that he 'was someone.'

Zora had at least 3 siblings, two brothers and a sister. When her mother died, and her father remarried it actually ruined things for the children of his first wife. There was some trouble caused by his deceptions to his wife - because his children knew the truth and asserted it rather than conspiring with their father. She worked beginning from when she was 14 years old. She attended Negro college, but not until after she was able to get to school in order to finish her secondary education.

Zora often felt unusual when young because she was really into school and liked books and reading. She felt fortunate and grateful when anyone who knew her and could actually give her a book. She was amongst the first or second generation of American Negroes who were born free, and free from the direct and real fear of slavery in America. During her career she was able to interview Cudjo Lewis, or Kossola-O-Lo-Loo-Ay. He was the last known living man to have been captured in Africa and brought to America to live as a slave. Zora lived her life as an incredibly gifted, well recognized African-American woman Southerner.



Tone

The tone of the book is quite personable. It is set out quite clearly. The work runs chronologically. The author has written the book for the purposes of sharing her life story with those who may be interested in knowing it. There is an element of intimacy to it, in that, however edited, the work effectively encapsulates the over all feel and quality of Zora's life. There is something false about the intimacy in that readers have nothing but a book she has written and Zora is unable to comment on the life of whichever reader it is. At the same time, it is very true that intimacy is really knowing someone and also being known - through reading the autobiography Zora allows readers to really know her. At least, she is very effective at writing in a manner that gives readers this feeling.

There are a number of 'themes' or main concepts that run through the work or Zora's life. Each plays into the tone of her life story. One is the emergence of a girl, in this case a highly talented girl, into a grown woman and how she manages to use at least some of her inherent gifts. More than once Zora shares the strange feeling she gets when she knows someone who is obviously full of talent much of which has remained suspended in the form of potential within that individual. It is a poignant emotion for Zora. Another concept is: the real life of an American Negro - nowadays this group is called either African-American or black. She does include the race issue, but it isn't her main focus. However, readers find that as it is a natural part of her life, the ways it affects her are shown quite clearly. This is a perspective which is more often experienced than articulated or well written about in America. Another theme is educated career women. Zora turns out to be one of these. Love: Zora writes of both friendship and of romance during her autobiography. She also writes of familial love and the reality of love amongst colleagues. Morality and benevolence are also written of in the book. These are mainly expressed in the way she finds and earns money, in how she treats those she knows and how she behaves in romance. Included in this is the minor running theme of benevolent white people. The main reason she thinks of them this way is because of the ways racial differences have influenced the culture and also that when this has been used as an important demarcation viewing people as 'a race' based on skin color causes her to see 'the white man' as such. She searches for 'the Negro' and can't find it.

The overall tone of the work is expressive and creative within the bounds of the truth. Her use of simile and of metaphor are written forms of Southern ways. In this regard, she is also dispensing hints to readers about the Southern American culture. Instructive, but after the manner of learning through friendship.

Structure

The book opens with an Introduction by the esteemed Maya Angelou. She helps readers to put the author into the proper context of her time and place. Then the book is structured in a simple series of chapters. These are arranged more in chronological than in topical order. These are relatively short. the shortest of these runs only seven



pages long. The longest hover around the 20 page length mark. They are also rather numerous, totaling to 16, plus an Appendix. She has also included a Bibliography.

The chapters are titled. As is often the case with such things, the titles amount to cryptic messages which suggest the contents. Only after a chapter has been read, does the real meaning of the title become fully known. The shortest chapter title is one word. Chapter 14: Love. The longest has five words. This is Chapter 8: Back Stage and the Railroad.

Each of the chapters summaries a phase of the author's life. The connection between her education and her career is quite obvious. The relationship does not begin to show effectively until chapter 10, when she gets her first boost from those who have taught her. This occurs when she is granted a research fellowship to delve into African-American folk tales. One of her instructors found this for her, and made sure that she got it; he then simply told her to do this and she willingly accepted his leadership. Hence, Chapter 10: Research. From then on, her education and career blend together effectively. Prior to that, her work experience had everything to do with the shortages in her education, her age, her gender and her race. Nevertheless, she learned a great deal from that, and her good experiences with the Gilbert & Sullivan people turns up again when she has success with organized singing groups of African music. She had an additional boost on this point from her father, who was also an effective preacher. This indicates the strong tradition amongst American blacks that the religious leaders of the community are the true leaders, often on the civic level as well. This was seen to still be very much the case in the 1960s and may well still be the truth today in the New Millenium.



Quotes

"I was always asking and making myself a crow in a pigeon's nest" (p. 25).

"Company got the preference in toilet paper to" (p. 17).

"So that when Mama suggested that the old Potts place be sold so that she could bring her share back with her from Florida, her mother urged on by Uncle Bud, Mama's oldest brother, refused" (p. 63).

"I do not think that the money part worried Mama as much as the injustice and spitefulness of the thing" (p. 63).

"The rod of compement was laid to my back. I must go the way" (p. 86).

"The five years following my leaving the school at Jacksonville were haunted. I was shifted from house to house of my relatives and friends and found comfort nowhere," (p. 87).

"This book reading was a hold-back and an unrelieved evil" (p. 88).

"It seems to me that trying to live without friends, is like milking a bear to get cream for your morning coffee" (p. 202).

"I was out of a job again. I got out of many more. Sometimes I didn't suit the people. Sometimes the people didn't suit me. Sometimes my insides tortured me so that I was restless and unstable. I just was not the type. I was doing none of the things I wanted to do" (p. 97).

"We were so certain of Papa's invincibility in combat...We had seen him bring down bears and panthers with his gun, and chin the bar more times than any man in competing distance" (p.68).

"Right away I decided that Big Sweet was going to be my friend. From what I had seen and heard in the short time I had been there, I felt as timid as an egg without a shell....By the time we got to the Commissary post office we were getting along fine. She told everybody she was my friend" (p.154).

"I saw no escape for me when Lucy strode in, knife in hand. I saw sudden death very near that moment. I was paralyzed with fear," (p. 155).

"I am due to have this friendship with Ethel Waters because I worked for it" (p. 197).

Topics for Discussion

Was the letter exchange with the President of the author's secondary school 'anything'? Please explain your point of view.

Regarding Eatonville, Florida: do you feel this intentionally segregated town was a healthy project for America after the Civil War? Defend your answer.

Who is Captain Eaton and why does he matter so much?

Who is Big Sweet and how did she save Zora's life from Lucy?

Which is your favorite chapter of this book and why?

Why didn't Zora write all about 'the race issue'?

Did Zora have a conflict between love and her career? If so, please describe it. If not, please explain it.