

**IDH2930 – University of Florida Honors Program UnCommon Reads**  
**Zora Neale Hurston and Their Eyes Were Watching God**  
**Tuesdays, Period 9 (4:05PM – 4:55 PM)**  
**Little Hall Rm 117**

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Photo of Zora Neale Hurston and first edition 1937

**Course Description:**

This course focuses on native Floridian, anthropologist, folklorist, and Harlem Renaissance great, Zora Neale Hurston and her classic novel, *Their Eyes Were Watching God*. It is a novel about a young woman's fight to find herself despite societal pressures that want to constrain her, mold her, and fit her into a person outside herself. Set in rural Florida in the mid-1930s, Janie Crawford's story is a powerful exploration of identity, resilience, and the quest for autonomy in a society marked by racial and gendered oppression. This class will use *Their Eyes Were Watching God* as the primary text, and we will also use the 2005 film, and other resources related to the life and work of Zora Neale Hurston, and those who have written about similar themes to understand how Hurston's legacy of interrogating and celebrating the rich hues of everyday life still live in contemporary society. We will also plan to travel to the Zora! Festival and the Zora Neale Hurston Museum in Eatonville, Florida. The Zora! Festival is a yearly festival to celebrate the life and work of Zora Neale Hurston. We will also have occasional guest speakers. Students will discuss the book and the supplementary resources and tie the contents to current events. This course is especially timely since The UF George A. Smathers Libraries in partnership with the Alachua County Library District, and the UF College of the Arts, have created a Big Read for the book, which is a year-long celebration of Zora Neale Hurston and the novel *Their Eyes Were Watching God*.

**Learning Outcomes:**

Students will discuss and examine the life of Zora Neale Hurston as a Black woman Floridian, anthropologist, folklorist, and Harlem Renaissance great as it relates to history of the 20<sup>th</sup> century.

Students will analyze “coming of age” themes of the past and present and how they have changed, or not – considering gender, desire, love, and independence.

Students will assess the themes of power and domination and how they operate on the individual, interpersonal and societal level.

Students will discuss the development of voice, language and storytelling in the Black literary tradition and how Hurston uses anthropology to construct Black American narratives

Students will analyze why *Their Eyes Were Watching God* has been both well-beloved and intensely criticized over time.

### **Use of Derogatory Language**

*Their Eyes Were Watching God* was originally published in 1937. It is representative of a period in literary time in American history. We continue to use it because it is timeless in its execution of particular themes. Nevertheless, the novel and its language is a reflection of the times in which it was written. As such, we will not use the language that has been identified as offensive in common contemporary parlance. We will discuss these terms and language as a class.

### **Sensitive Subject Matter:**

This course requires engagement with issues of a potentially sensitive nature. Some of our readings and class discussions will frankly address race, ethnicity, health, and sexuality among other topics. While you are not required to self-disclose in assignments or discuss information with which you are uncomfortable, I do expect you to read and discuss in class the articles and chapters assigned. If you anticipate problems completing the readings or participating in class discussions, please talk to me well in advance. A passing grade in this class is not dependent on what you disclose in your writings and discussion but rather how well you engage the reading, think analytically, and write effectively. (adapted from Lindeman SDSU)

### **Colleague Sensitivity:**

We each come from a range of backgrounds and have had a host of experiences that may affect how we read, discuss, and experience various aspects of the course and our work together as colleagues. There may be information presented, or statements made that cause various emotions during class, while reading, or even post class when one has had time to think about the material alone or with others. I ask that we come to the readings, assignments, and discussions with compassion and empathy; for ourselves as individuals, and for others as colleagues in a community of learning. As your course instructor and facilitator, I will work to be attentive and to address concerns as sensitively as possible, however, I ask that if you experience something you would like to discuss, please make me aware after class, in office hours, or by appointment.

### **Wellness:**

We are currently experiencing particularly difficult times as a society.

The University offers resources that you should feel welcome to utilize. Contact information for the Counseling and Wellness Center: <http://www.counseling.ufl.edu/cwc/Default.aspx>, 392-1575; and the University Police Department: 392-1111 or 9-1-1 for emergencies.

### **Course Work Expectations:**

All student assignments must be type-written, double-spaced, with pagination, your name on each page, and submitted via Canvas using docx or pdf files. Writing is assessed along with content and will result in deductions in grading if there are significant errors in grammar, punctuation and style and/or the writing impairs the reader's ability to understand the content. With this in mind, please utilize the College of Arts and Sciences Writing Center.

I may occasionally recommend that students see me and/or a counselor for assistance in which case the student would be able to resubmit the assignment after having met with me and/or a tutor. This is the only time I allow resubmissions.

**Accommodations**

Students with disabilities who experience learning barriers and would like to request academic accommodations should connect with the disability Resource Center. It is important for students to share their accommodation letter with me and discuss their access needs, as early as possible in the semester. <https://disability.ufl.edu/students/accommodations/>

**Plagiarism and Cheating:**

Plagiarism will not be tolerated in this class. Students caught plagiarizing, defined as misrepresenting another's work as one's own through omission, evasiveness, and/or improper citation, may receive an F on the assignment and in the class. Common yet no less egregious plagiarism includes using verbatim other authors' summaries of research and then citing the primary source rather than citing the author who summarizes that primary source. If you are unsure about when you may be in danger of plagiarizing please talk with me. (adapted from Lindeman SDSU) Additionally, students now have access to tools like ChatGPT that may assist in the writing process. It is imperative that if you utilize ChatGPT to aid in your writing you cite any ideas that are not your own as being generated by ChatGPT. Because this is a learning environment, using ChatGPT (and related AI tools) as if what they generate is your own thought or language does not help you to learn, only to complete an assignment. As students in an educational environment, we are in the business of learning.

**Classroom Policies Honor Code/Ethical Practice:**

You are required to abide by the Student Honor Code. Any violation of the academic integrity expected of you will result in a minimum academic sanction, most likely a failing grade on the assignment or assessment. Any alleged violations of the Student Honor Code will result in a referral to Student Conduct and Conflict Resolution. Please review the Student Honor Code and Student Conduct Code at [sccr.dso.ufl.edu/policies/student-honor-code-student-conduct-code/](https://sccr.dso.ufl.edu/policies/student-honor-code-student-conduct-code/)

**Audio/Visual Policy:**

To encourage active engagement and academic inquiry in the classroom, as well as to safeguard the privacy of students and faculty, no form of audio or visual recording in the classroom is permitted without explicit permission from the professor/instructor or without a letter from the Disability Resource Center, signed by the faculty member, authorizing the recording as an accommodation. Authorized recordings may only be used by a student who has obtained permission and may not be shared or distributed for any reason.

See the University of Florida Guidance for Recording a Class Lecture

<https://sccr.dso.ufl.edu/policies/codechanges/>

**Avoid Unauthorized Recordings:**

A Student shall not make a video or audio Recording. A Recording must not be published without the prior express written consent of the faculty or guest lecturer.

A Student shall not make a recording in class, through any means over any medium, of anything other than a class lecture, including but not limited to the recording of any assessment, clinical activity, lab, or student presentation. The recording of any meeting or conversation in class between students or between students and faculty or guest lecturer is strictly prohibited.

**Do Not Share or Publish Recordings:**

A student, independently or with another person or other people, must not without express written authorization take, give, publish, post or submit, transmit, or receive materials, information, or resources in any manner, through any medium, for the purpose of gaining or providing an improper academic advantage to any student.

**Course Evaluation:**

Students are expected to provide professional and respectful feedback on the quality of instruction in this course by completing course evaluations online via GatorEvals. Guidance on how to give feedback in a professional and respectful manner is available at [gatorevals.aa.ufl.edu/students/](http://gatorevals.aa.ufl.edu/students/). Students will be notified when the evaluation period opens, and can complete evaluations through the email they receive from GatorEvals, in their Canvas course menu under GatorEvals, or via [ufl.bluera.com/ufl/](http://ufl.bluera.com/ufl/). Summaries of course evaluation results are available to students at [gatorevals.aa.ufl.edu/public-results/](http://gatorevals.aa.ufl.edu/public-results/). Additionally, I ask that students make me aware of any difficulties they may be having with the course prior to the end of term. In the same way that I offer you feedback on your progress through the course, I welcome the same from you so that I may have an opportunity to improve the course while we are in it, as opposed to waiting. While the end of term evaluations are helpful for future iterations of the course. It is equally helpful to know what is or is not working during the course. To that end, I will periodically ask you for your input and insights.

**Use of Electronics:**

It is true that we now live in a sort of “Jetsons” age. However, I view the classroom as a professional environment much like an office or team meeting. It is quite rude in that context to take or receive phone calls, emails, chats, etc. Therefore, students are asked to turn off or silence their electronic devices including smart phones before arriving in class. If you forget and your phone rings, you are asked to quietly turn it off and proceed with class without any further distractions. If you need to take the call, silence it, and quietly leave the classroom and take your call outside. If you have, or anticipate an emergency that requires you to be available electronically, you are required to let me know, and step outside the classroom to take care of **ALL** electronic communications. Students may use laptops, ipads, ereaders, and other electronic reading devices **to read or view classroom materials ONLY**. You may not use these devices for social networking, “googling”, or other purposes not related to the course. Not only is a wandering screen distracting to the user, it is just as distracting to those nearby since we all know, at this point, screens are hard to resist!

**Disclaimer:**

Many students have already read *Their Eyes Were Watching God* and/or been introduced to various excerpts and/or themes. Nevertheless, it is important that you read it again and come to this course seeking a deeper critical analysis.

**Assignments and Evaluation****Attendance (20%)**

Students must be present and engaged in class. There will be periodic in-class assignments to accompany class discussion.

**Participation in Class Discussion (50%)**

Students should expect to discuss the course materials with critical engagement. This means students spend time with the materials, think deeply about what they are reading and engage thoughtfully and with insights.

**Contemporary Interpretation of *Their Eyes Were Watching God* (30%)**

There are now several editions of *Their Eyes Were Watching God* and a made for tv movie adaptation. Students are asked to consider the themes of the novel and create their own interpretation, adaptation and representation. This can take any scholarly, creative, or praxis form. For example, students may choose to write a scholarly paper about the themes and have them address a contemporary societal issue such as gender violence in the US or abroad or climate change as it pertains to extreme weather events. Or students may choose to write a short story or script or make a short film or photographic montage, about coming of age in Florida today. Students may choose to create a podcast in which they interview their peers about some of the themes identified in the book for a contemporary audience. Or for those who are more service oriented, perhaps you want to create a program for contemporary women and girls to address the issues discussed in the novel. Or perhaps you want to complete a historiography about the time period in which Zora Neale Hurston lived and the things she and other marginalized writers might have had to encounter and endure, why, and how things may or may not have changed since then.

These are just examples and students are welcomed to follow their own interests and encouraged to be as creative as possible! Students will have an opportunity to get their idea approved in consultation with me (10%). Students will have a tangible “product” representing their work on this project (10%). Students will present their interpretation to the class (10%).

**Grading**

This is an Honors Program course. For those taking it for Honors credit, a minimum grade of B is required to earn Academic points towards your Honors Completion Requirements. (Exception: Honors Quest I and II sections require a C). Once you have earned your final grade in this course, please upload the course information and final grade from your Unofficial Transcript into your Honors Canvas Cohort: Honors Completion module to earn Honors Milestone / Completion credit.

Have questions specific to the honors program?

Contact the Honors Program directly, 201 Walker Hall, 352-392-1519

Quick questions for an Honors advisor?

Email [advisor@honors.ufl.edu](mailto:advisor@honors.ufl.edu)

Need an Honors advising appointment?

Schedule via Microsoft Bookings: <https://bit.ly/ufhonorsadvising>

**Required Text:**

\*Zora Neale Hurston. *Their Eyes Were Watching God*. (any edition is fine)

\*Supplementary readings will be assigned and posted to Canvas. These readings are offered to help students situate the novel within larger historical and contemporary frameworks.

\*Films will be viewed either in class or posted to Canvas for viewing at home.

**Course Outline**

Your reading assignment is provided for each week. Course requirements are due the day they appear on the outline. In-class assignments, homework assignments and pop quizzes/short writing assignments will be disseminated periodically throughout the course. The schedule is subject to minor changes. You will be notified of changes verbally and in writing.

\*Still Scheduling. I will let you know once they are in place:

Visit to the UF archives – Zora Neale Hurston collection

Guest speakers

Possible field trip to Eatonville, FL

Alachua County Big Read events

**Tuesday, January 14****Introductions, course overview**

In-class film: Who was Zora Neale Hurston?

“Zora Neale Hurston: Heart with Room for Every Joy”

**Tuesday, January 21**

Film: Claiming Her Space (Canvas)

Reading: Alice Walker, “Looking for Zora” (Canvas)

Reading: Mary Helen Washington, “Zora Neale Hurston: A Woman Half in Shadow” (Canvas)

Reading: Khiara Bridges, Introduction “Still Searching for Zora Neale Hurston”

**Tuesday, January 28**

Reading: Their Eyes Were Watching God (TEWWG) Chapters 1-5

**Tuesday, February 4**

Reading: TEWWG Chapters 6-10

**Tuesday, February 11**

Reading: TEWWG Chapters 11-15

**Tuesday, February 18**

Reading: TEWWG Chapters 16-20

**Tuesday, February 25**

In-class: Alice Walker on TEWWG

Reading: First book reviews of TEWWG (Canvas)

**Tuesday, March 4**

Reading: Maria Tai Wolff, “Listening and Living: Reading and Experience in Their Eyes Were Watching God”

Reading: S. Jay Walker, Zora Neale Hurston's "Their Eyes Were Watching God": Black Novel of Sexism

**Tuesday, March 11**

Reading: Skip Norman, “The Use of African American Culture as a Foundation for Community Cohesion and Self-Esteem in “Their Eyes Were Watching God”

Reading: Khiara Bridges, Complete “Still Searching for Zora Neale Hurston”

Reading: Irma McClaurin, “Zora Neale Hurston’s Gifts to Anthropology, Part 1” and “....Part 2”

**Tuesday, March 18:** Spring Break. No Classes

Watch the film: Their Eyes Were Watching God. <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=teUi8N5ZaNs>

**Tuesday, March 25**

**Submit: Contemporary Interpretations Proposal**

**Tuesday, April 1**

Visit UF archives

**Tuesday, April 8**

Reading: Mary Helen Washington, "I love the way Janie Crawford left her husbands"

Reading: Carol Batker, "Love Me Like I Like To Be: The Sexual Politics of Hurston's Their Eyes Were Watching God"

**Tuesday, April 15**

**Contemporary Interpretations Presentations**

**Tuesday, April 22 Last Day of Class**

**Contemporary Interpretations Presentations**

**April 24-25 Reading Days**

**No Final Exam**