Zora Neale Hurston

Their Eyes Were Watching God | Background

Directions: The best way to remember authors is to act as though they are people that you know in real life. Try to remember the basics, but also random facts about each author. In the long run, it is the random things that we retain. This is an autobiographical overview of the iconic Zora Neale Hurston.

Zora Neale Hurston was born on the seventh of January 1891 in Notasulga, Alabama. When she was still young, her family moved to Eatonville, Florida, (where she grew up). Eatonville (on the outskirts of Orlando) was the nation’s first incorporated black township (established in 1887). In this setting, Hurston was submersed in a culture that challenged the prominent racism in the rest of the American South. Hurston grew up witnessing black achievement and success. Her father worked at the town hall; and the family enjoyed a secure lifestyle until she was thirteen years old. She lived in an eight-bedroom house on five acres of land and enjoyed a pleasant childhood with seven other siblings. In 1904, her mother passed away. Her father remarried quickly. Hurston allegedly almost killed the new, younger wife in a fistfight. After her mother’s death, her father had little time or money for his children. Hurston had several odds jobs, struggled in school, and eventually joined a traveling troupe as a maid to the lead singer. In 1917, she found herself in Baltimore. In order to finish her schooling, she had to lie about her age. She enrolled in school claiming to be ten years younger than she was at the time. Though she was twenty-six, she claimed to be sixteen. In 1928, Hurston graduated from Barnard College. She eventually moved to Harlem where she began publishing short stories and articles. She helped pave the way for the Harlem Renaissance. She befriended Langston Hughes. She was highly social and charismatic. She furnished her apartment from donations solicited from friends and was often the life of the party. Though she was often social, she was known to sometimes sneak off to another room during a party to write. Though she had success with a few pieces in the 20s, Hurston’s career took off in the 30s and 40s. Though highly recognized and successful, she often did not receive rightful financial compensation for her accomplishments. She later moved back to Florida. When she died at the age of 69 (January 28, 1960), the neighbors took up a collection in order to pay for her funeral. Her tombstone remained unmarked until 1973. It was Alice Walker that had her tombstone engraved. She engraved, “Zora Neale Hurston: A Genius of the South,” borrowed from a line in a Jean Toomer poem. Hurston’s works are largely recognized and studied across the United States today. Her legacy lives on.

Re-worded from: https://www.zoranealehurston.com/about/