



JUMP AT THE SUN

Zora Neale Hurston
and
Her Eatonville Roots

A GUIDE FOR TEACHERS

prepared by
Alice Morgan Grant

Graphics by
Shirley Cannon

Copyright 1991 by Association to Preserve the Eatonville Community. All rights reserved, including the right to reproduce this work in any form whatsoever without prior written permission from the publisher.

For information write: P.E.C.
P.O. Box 2586
Eatonville, Florida 32751

Grant, Alice Morgan

Jump at the Sun: Zora Neale Hurston and Her Eatonville Roots: a guide for teachers prepared for teachers / prepared by Alice Morgan Grant; with graphics by Shirley Cannon. – Eatonville, Fla.: Association to Preserve the Eatonville Community, 1990.

p. cm.

Guide designed to be used as introduction to the exhibit “Jump at the Sun: Zora Neale Hurston and her Eatonville Roots” designed and fabricated by Guglielmo & Associates.

Includes bibliographical references.

1. Hurston, Zora Neale–Study and teaching
2. Hurston, Zora Neale–Biography.
3. Jump at the Sun: Zora Neale Hurston and her Eatonville Roots Exhibit
4. Eatonville, Florida History

I. Association to Preserve the Eatonville Community.

II. Cannon, Shirley

III. Guglielmo & Associates

Library of Congress Catalog Card Number: 91-070293



ZORA NEALE HURSTON

A BRIEF BIOGRAPHY

Zora Neale Hurston, writer, anthropologist, and folklorist was born on January 7, 1891. Various other dates, including 1901, 1903 and 1907 are frequently cited in the literature but current scholarship confirms 1891 as the correct date. Though she grew up in the all-African American town of Eatonville, Florida, family records indicate that she and the five siblings that preceded her were actually born in Nostalsulga, Alabama. The family probably moved to central Florida when Zora was an infant. She was the sixth of nine children born to John Hurston, a tenant farmer who also pastored the local Baptist church and served as the town's third mayor and Lucy Ann Potts, daughter of an Alabama land-owner.

As a child, Zora was especially bright and curious. Her father thought she was too highly-spirited and often reminded her that she was not "white." On the other hand, her mother encouraged all the children to be ambitious, to "jump at de sun." Sometime during her childhood, Zora's mother died and her father quickly remarried. Zora did not get along with her stepmother and for several years was passed from one relative or friend to another.

Although her schooling was often interrupted because she moved around, she read constantly continued to sharpen her creative abilities by daydreaming and playacting. One of her favorite childhood haunts was "the lying porch" of Joe Clarke's store, so called because of the stories and tall-tales that were told there. She was to commit many of those "literary gems" to memory and later incorporate them into her works. As an adult, Zora often returned to Eatonville and spent more hours on the porch gathering more material from this great reservoir of the "heart and soul" of her people.

Zora eventually gave up on education, at least temporarily, and began to work at many odd jobs. Finally, she struck out on her own, working as a maid with a traveling theatrical company. She left the troupe in Baltimore and worked as a waitress while completing her high school education at Morgan Academy.¹ From there she went to Howard University in nearby Washington, D.C. At Howard she was encouraged to write by Alain Locke, one of the early leaders of African-American people, and other English professors. Her first published work, the short story "Drenched in Light" appeared in a 1924 edition of Opportunity, a magazine published by the Urban League. Zora then moved on to New York City where she won prizes in the short story and one-act play categories of the Urban League's literacy contest held in 1925. This recognition brought her employment as secretary to novelist Fannie Hurst and eventually a scholarship to Barnard College, in New York.

¹ See Section in this manual entitled "Zora's Cosmos" for additional information about this and other names mentioned in this biography.



At Barnard, Zora switched her major from English to anthropology, studying under Franz Boas, outstanding professor of anthropology. When her secretarial skills proved inadequate, she became the companion of Mrs. Osgood Mason, patron of the arts. "Godmother," as Zora dubbed her, encouraged Zora's association with Langston Hughes, famous African-American poet, and other artists of the Harlem Renaissance. After graduating from Barnard in 1928, Zora spent four years collecting folklore in Harlem and through out the South. In later years she received fellowships to continue her anthropological research in the South, the West Indies, and Haiti.

Zora's published writings include her autobiography. Dust Tracks on a Road; four novels. Jonah's Gourd Vine, Their Eyes Were Watching God, Moses, Man of the Mountain and Seraph on the Sewanee; two collections of folklore, Of Men and Mules and Tell My Horse; and numerous short stories, articles, and plays. She also co-authored a "folk opera," "Mule Bone," with Langston Hughes, but a disagreement between the two prevented its production.

Despite a prolific outpour of writing, Zora was never a financial success. Like many of the other writers of the post World War II era, she worked for a time with the Federal Writer's Project, gathering information about Negro life in Florida. She also held teaching positions and worked for a short time as a scriptwriter in Hollywood. During the last year of her life, she supported herself as a substitute teacher and a columnist for the Ft. Pierce Chronicle, a weekly newspaper. She died in poverty and obscurity in Fort Pierce. Florida tn 1960.

FOR FURTHER READING:

Hemenway, Robert. Zora Neale Hurston: A Literary Biography. Chicago: University of Illinois Press. 1977.

Hurston, Zora Neale. Dust Tracks on a Road, 2nd ed. Urbana, IL: University of Illinois Press. 1984.



Courtesy of Louise Franklin

EATONVILLE HISTORY AND PROFILE

Eatonville, Florida, generally recognized as the first incorporated African-American township in the United States, sits at the northeast corner of Orange County, approximately ten miles north of Orlando, Florida. The town's original settlers were newly-freed slaves who came from Georgia, Alabama, and other parts of that community. These newly freedmen labored at clearing land, planting crops and citrus groves, and helping to build houses, hotels, and the railroad system. In a few years some of them became community leaders, businessmen and respected citizens of the newly developed town of Maitland. African-Americans were among the first town officials in Maitland.

By 1887 the African-American settlers in Maitland became interested in establishing their own town. An all-African-American town seems to have initially been a dream of Joseph E. Clarke, but he was unsuccessful in his attempts to purchase land for that purpose. Eventually through the goodwill of Lewis Lawrence, a northern philanthropist, and Josiah Eaton, a local landowner, 112 acres were acquired by Joe Clarke and others, and they comprised the original city limits of the Town of Eatonville.



The name was suggested by Lewis Lawrence, in honor of Josiah Eaton. On August 15, 1887, 27 electors gathered at the “town hall” and cast their votes for Columbus H. Boger as mayor; for Joe Clarke, Matthew Brazell, David Yelder, E.L. Horn, and E.J. Shines as aldermen; and for several other town officers. Thus the first town to be organized, governed, and incorporated by African-American citizens in this country was born.

Central to the early life in Eatonville were three institutions – the church, the school, and the family. The first ten acres of the land Lawrence purchased were given to the trustees of the Methodist Church known today as the St. Lawrence African Methodist Episcopal Church. Founded in 1881, St. Lawrence was the first African-American church in the area. A year later, Macedonia Baptist Church was organized. Today, these two churches are still among the Town’s fourteen houses of worship.

A second institution which for years was a hallmark of the Town was the Hungerford Normal and Industrial School. Founded in 1889 by Robert Hungerford and others who made up its governing body, the school was named in honor of Hungerford’s physician son. He had given his life to save the lives of some African-Americans who were besieged with scarlet fever. Russell C. Calhoun and his wife, Mary, came from Tuskegee Institute in Alabama to serve as the first administrators. By 1935 the school had become the premier place for Negro learning in central Florida.

The emphasis placed on religious training and education by the early citizens of Eatonville was thought to be essential to the development of strong family units. Early settlers worked hard to buy land on which they built family homes, planted crops and citrus grove, and raised livestock. Maintenance of the property and the crops and animals that provided sustenance for the family was usually a “family affair.” Children were trained early in domestic arts and farming practices.

Though religion, schooling, and family life are still central to life in Eatonville, many other institutions, services, and a great sense of civic pride have enabled the Town to grow and to thrive during its more than 100 years of existence. Its current population of approximately 3,000 enjoy the benefits derived from many federal and state funded community improvement projects. Essential services such as fire and police protection, water and sewage are maintained by city officials. New businesses, light industry, and real estate development have increased employment opportunities and added to the Town’s tax base. Thirteen mayors, hundreds of city officials, and thousands of residents have contributed to the survival and the success of Eatonville, Florida. Four-G Publishers, Inc., 1989.

FOR FURTHER READING:

Hurston, Zora, Neale. Dust Tracks on a Road. 2nd ed. Urbana. IL: University of Illinois Press, 1984.

Otey, Frank M. Eatonville, Florida: A Brief History
Winter Park, FL: Four-G Publishers, Inc., 1989.



SOME SUGGESTED ACTIVITIES FOR REINFORCING BACKGROUND INFORMATION ABOUT ZORA NEALE HURSTON

Timelines

After reading or hearing details of Zora Neale Hurston's life, construct a timeline on the chalkboard. Discuss relevant events, overlap of activities, significant people and movement of artists from one geographical point to another.

Then, encourage students to construct their own timelines on strips of craft paper or computer paper. Subjects for their timelines may be an elderly relative or another African-American from Hurston's period.

Word Search

Each of the following words has some relationship to the life and work of Zora Neale Hurston. Have students search for them in a puzzle grid. The words may be found in horizontal, vertical, diagonal, or backwards positions. A follow-up discussion should focus on the definitions of and the significance of the terms as they relate to Ms. Hurston and her era.

Relatives	Oranges	Short story
Sun	Minister	Secretary
Eatonville	Maid	Folklore
Voodoo	South	Turpentine
Novels	Poverty	Harlem
Religion	Autobiography	Juke joints

Words Within Words

How many words can you find in Eatonville, Florida/Harlem Renaissance/Zora Neale Hurston?

Rules

1. Words must be four or more letters
2. Words that acquire four letters by the addition of "s" are unacceptable
3. Proper nouns are unacceptable
4. Slang words are unacceptable

A Day In The Life

Have students write a journal or diary entry about what they perceive to be a typical day in the life of Zora Neale Hurston. They may choose a day from her childhood, her days as a college student, her days in New York as part of the Harlem Renaissance, her days in the South collecting folklore, or her last days fighting to survive.