

## THE BIG READ: “Their Eyes Were Watching God” by Zora Neale Hurston Selected For Community-Wide Book Reading

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More than before.



Bakersfield Museum of Art and the Kern County Library are kicking off “The Big Read” in Bakersfield, beginning this winter with a community-wide effort to read “Their Eyes Were Watching God” by Zora Neale Hurston.

This far reaching effort is part of an \$8,000 grant the Museum received from the National Endowment for the Arts and the Institute for Museum and Library Services. Some \$2 million in grants for The Big Read was awarded to 208 grantees including libraries, arts groups, science organizations, colleges, and municipalities.

The Big Read coincides with the Museum’s exhibit, “Harlem Renaissance” which will run from December 11, 2008 – February 15, 2009. A committee consisting of community leaders, school and library officials, Museum members and others has been working to organize activities associated with the book and the time period.

Copies of “Their Eyes Were Watching God” will be available for purchase at the Bakersfield Museum of Art and Russo’s Books, beginning November 17. They can also be borrowed from Kern County Library locations as books and on disc. Kern County readers are encouraged to begin reading the book now in order to participate in activities scheduled in January.

Book clubs and other groups are encouraged to read the book and schedule discussions. Study guides, discussion questions, posters and other items are available at no charge. The Museum will offer its facility, at no cost other than normal admission prices, to groups that want to host a discussion. Call 323-7219 for information on times and dates that are available to use the facility.

A host of other events are planned to promote the reading of the highly acclaimed book which chronicles the journey of Janie Mae Crawford from her grandmother's plantation shack to Logan Killicks' farm, to all-black Eatonville, to the Everglades-until a tragedy brings her back to Eatonville. From this vantage point, Janie narrates her life story to her best friend, Pheoby Watson, satisfying the "oldest human longing-self-revelation."

Although the novel is not an autobiography, Hurston once reflected that it is, at heart, a love story, inspired by "the real love affair of [her] life." She also fictionalized another important incident in her life in the novel: In 1929, Hurston survived a five-day hurricane in the Bahamas, getting herself and another family out of a house moments before it began to collapse.

The Big Read is an initiative of the National Endowment for the Arts, designed to restore reading to the center of American culture. The NEA presents The Big Read in partnership with the Institute of Museum and Library Services and in cooperation with Arts Midwest. The Big Read brings together partners across the country to encourage reading for pleasure and enlightenment.

**For more information:**

**The Big Read website at [neabigread.com](http://neabigread.com)**

**The Kern County Library at [kerncountylibrary.org](http://kerncountylibrary.org)**

**The Zora Neale Hurston website at [zoranealehurston.com](http://zoranealehurston.com)**