

Summer challenge #5: Get classic

Do you do much reading? I do, but rarely do I read classic novels, instead I spend a lot of time reading Scandinavian detective novels (I've read almost everything by Hakan Nesser, Camilla Lackberg, Stieg Larsson, Arnaldur Indridasson, and on and on.)

But this summer, my book group has given me a chance to read something classic I have always wanted to read: *Their Eyes Were Watching God* by Zora Neale Hurston. It was published in 1937, and centers around a strong, black female character (Janie Crawford). It was not well received when Hurston published it, but it has become a must-read in American literature. The dialogue is challenging to read, but Hurston's descriptions and how she captures a very specific time and place are a delight.

Some book characters become iconic and often-quoted. Some lines, such as the first line of Charles Dickens' *Great Expectations* ("It was the best of times, it was the worst of times...") or *Hamlet's* "to be or not to be" become instantly recognizable.

For many of us, we last read classic novels in college or high school. We were all forced to wade through tough books such as *Moby Dick* (and in my case, I had to read it at least twice, once in high school and then in college). But now I am grateful to have read all about Ahab and his search for the great white whale, if only because I know that Starbucks coffee is named after the Pequod's first officer Starbuck.

Without reading the great works, we miss a lot of references. We miss a lot of cultural knowledge. Reading classics exposes us to truly great writing, which stands up to time, in some

cases, centuries (we are still reading Shakespeare after nearly 500 years).

Why not take the dog days of summer to read a classic that you have always wanted to read? That's my summer challenge to you!

If you need some ideas, here are a couple lists to help you choose:

The Modern Library's list of 100 Best Novels

The top classic books everybody should read from Indiana University

Must Reads in Literature

Many thanks to Jay Morris, of Jay Morris Communications, LLC, who gave me the idea to offer a reading challenge.

Let me know what you read and what you thought. Happy reading!