

Literary analysis of  
how it feels to be  
colored me by zora  
neale hurston



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The literary analysis I'm writing over is "How It Feels to Be Colored Me" by Zora Neale Hurston. She is an African American Modernist writer who conveyed a surprisingly positive, opportunistic, and realistic outlook on what it was like for her to live through racism.

Hurston grew up in an exclusively colored town in Eatonville, Florida. She was innocently unaware of the differences between herself and the differences outside her community.

Hurston was sent to Jacksonville far from Orange County where she grew up in her predominantly black town. She quickly became aware of the color of her skin and the difference it made within her life. Hurston is in a very different setting than the community she was in where she had nothing to worry about. She didn't let racism phase her personality of being genuinely nice to everyone. She managed to put the idea of slavery behind her, and look forward to the opportunities before her. She states, "I do not belong to the sobbing school of Negrohood who hold that nature somehow has given them a lowdown dirty deal and whose feelings are all hurt about it." She was optimistic that she could achieve what she wanted to and convinced that life would afford her plenty of opportunities as long as she seized them. This quote embodies the opportunistic and powerful attitude that Hurston had adopted towards her life. She was focused on the future and what she could achieve with her own. She even manages to capture the feelings of discontent which were observable in some of her peers; that they had been wronged in some way by being African American. In a way the pessimism displayed by some of the African Americans she knew helped only to motivate her more and see her dreams actualized.

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In fact, Hurston had discovered a novel and positive way of viewing the circumstances that she found herself in. The time period which she was living in was focused on how African Americans would contribute and integrate with the society that they had previously been excluded from. This awareness and pressure to succeed could have produced feelings of negativity and nervousness, yet somehow Hurston managed to focus on the wonderful chance she was given to be in the spotlight. She states, " I shall get twice as much praise or twice as much blame." Instead of caving under the pressure of the circumstances she found herself in, she chose to rise to the challenge of asserting herself as an African American in a racially developing nation.

Hurston managed to overcome the rigid and structural nature of race by engaging and interacting with the art and music which was present in American culture at that time. She describes a scene where she is sitting with a white male at a night club The New World Cabaret. Within this scene we begin to see some of the differences between Hurston and her companion. The music is a chaotic presentation of the Jazz which was enjoyed by so many African Americans at the time. She manages to associate feelings of nativity, jubilation, and exaltation with the orchestra's performance. She connects the performance with the African American culture that she is shackled to, yet she has managed to free herself in many aspects. The scene she depicts within the club captures the multiplicity of Hurston's self. She is wild, untamed, and natively fused with the music and emotions she is experiencing. She truly enjoys being herself, yet something is still missing for her. When she returns from her musical adventure she

notices her white companion is not absorbed in the music as she is. He has sat and listened just as she did, but an expansive space still lingers between them. She simply cannot understand how he is not captured by the music as she is. He appears to be far away almost observing from a distance cautiously. Within the context of comparison it is easy for Hurston to examine and diagnose the differences their races display. She delves deeper though trying to identify what they have in common and this is how Hurston manages to overcome the boundary of race between them.

Hurston manages to surmount the differences in race with an approach that dissolves the obvious differences which are visual. The affinity which she has for the music and art that is influencing the nation at the time is the key to her success. Instead of remaining complacent and accepting that she is different from her white peers she looks for ways in which they are similar. However the club produces an awkward scenario for her to deal with. In this way music becomes the tool the Hurston uses to break down the walls of difference and awkwardness which separate her from her white friend. Music has no race, no prejudices, and no need to be anything other than music. You do not need to be an African American to appreciate jazz, and Hurston leads the way for her white companion to experience something new and dissolve the racial boundaries between them. She delivers an exclusive opportunity for both of them to simply be human beings instead of black and white.

Zora Hurston embodies a consciousness and self-awareness which could be observed in many white males at the time. Is it surprising that she displays this behavior due to the fact that she is an African American woman? I <https://assignbuster.com/literary-analysis-of-how-it-feels-to-be-colored-me-by-zora-neale-hurston/>

believe that Hurston was able to achieve a level of self-awareness due to the fact that she was happy to actively engage with people no matter what their gender or race. Even as a child Hurston was naturally interested in anyone she came across. The openness that she displayed toward people allowed her to inevitably experience and find herself in situations that many other African American women at that time may not have. In turn the experiences she had may have helped her to gain awareness and multiple viewpoints that many people might not achieve. Hurston notices the awkwardness that she feels when surrounded by many white people at the park, almost as if she is out of her comfort zone. She is likewise aware of the unfamiliarity that her white companion feels when accompanying her to the jazz club. Their evening at the jazz club is almost a repeated experiment for Hurston. She observes and questions why her friend is so different from herself. Hurston pushes and probes at all of the details encompassing the interaction. Without her exploration of the uncomfortable and unknown she would undoubtedly be a completely different woman. She is adventurous in her exploration of ideas, places, and people which exist outside of her comfort zone. This is the reason why Hurston so valiantly surpassed the social and racial barriers which stood before her.