

Study Guide for Nella Larsen's Passing

Nella Larsen's *Passing* tells the story of two light-skinned African American women, Clare Kendry and Irene Redfield, who live in New York City in the early 20th century. Clare is married to a white man and has been "passing" for white for several years. Irene is a black woman who is married to a black man.

The novel begins when Clare and Irene meet by chance on a train. They strike up a conversation and quickly become friends. However, their friendship is tested when Clare's husband discovers her true racial identity.

Clare is forced to confront her own identity and the choices she has made. She must decide whether to continue passing for white or to embrace her black heritage. Irene, too, must confront her own identity and her feelings about race.



Study Guide for Nella Larsen's Passing (Course Hero Study Guides) by Course Hero

★★★★☆ 4.4 out of 5

Language : English

File size : 940 KB

Print length : 27 pages

Lending : Enabled

Screen Reader : Supported



The novel ends with Clare's death. She is killed by her husband after he discovers her true racial identity. Irene is left to mourn her friend and to

reflect on the complexities of race and identity.

Clare Kendry is a complex and enigmatic character. She is a light-skinned African American woman who has been passing for white for several years. She is married to a white man and has a white son. Clare is a beautiful and intelligent woman, but she is also deeply insecure. She is constantly worried about being discovered and is terrified of what her husband will do if he finds out the truth.

Irene Redfield is a black woman who is married to a black man. She is a strong and independent woman, but she is also deeply aware of the racism that she faces. Irene is a close friend to Clare, but she is also critical of her friend's decision to pass for white.

John Bellew is Clare's husband. He is a white man who is deeply in love with his wife. However, he is also a racist and is horrified when he discovers Clare's true racial identity.

Nella Larsen's *Passing* explores a number of complex and important themes, including:

- **Race and identity** - The novel examines the complex and often contradictory nature of race and identity. Clare and Irene are both light-skinned African American women, but they have very different experiences of race. Clare chooses to pass for white, while Irene chooses to embrace her black heritage. The novel explores the reasons for their choices and the consequences of those choices.
- **The role of society** - The novel also examines the role that society plays in shaping our identities. Clare and Irene live in a society that is

deeply racist. This racism affects their lives in a number of ways, including their ability to form relationships, their access to education and employment, and their overall sense of self-worth.

- **The power of love** - The novel also explores the power of love. Clare and Irene are both deeply in love with their husbands. However, their love is tested by the racism that surrounds them. The novel explores the ways in which love can overcome racism, but it also explores the limits of love.

Nella Larsen's *Passing* is a complex and nuanced novel that explores the complexities of race and identity in the early 20th century. The novel offers a rich and insightful look at the lives of two light-skinned African American women who make very different choices about their racial identities. The novel is a must-read for anyone interested in the history of race and identity in America.

- [Nella Larsen's Passing: A Study Guide](#)
- [Passing: A Novel by Nella Larsen](#)
- [Nella Larsen: A Biography by Imani Perry](#)



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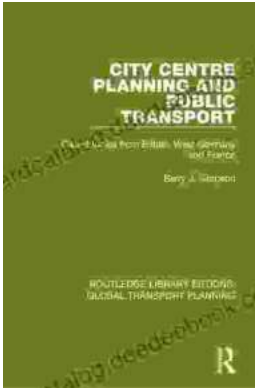
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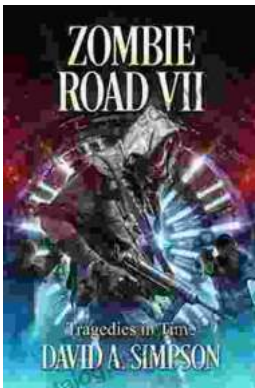
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