



Macmillan Collector's Library

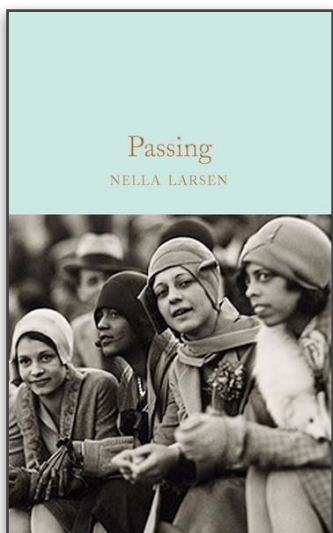
Why Read the Classics in Your Book Club?

Throughout history, book clubs have served as a forum for great minds to come together to share and discuss literature, as well as current events and issues. The Socratic circles, Ben Franklin's Junto Club, Stratford-on-Odeon, The Algonquin Round Table, and Oprah's Book Club are just a few famous ones.

It doesn't matter if your book club is seriously academic, highly social, or anything in between, recommend reading a classic next time! Classic literature is filled with gorgeous writing, complex plots, unforgettable characters along-side social and political issues that are still relevant today, making them great options for both fun and meaningful discussions.

We're here to help your book club tackle the literary canon with our Macmillan Collectors Library Book Club Guides to the Classics.

About the Book



ISBN: 978-1-52-904028-9

Passing is Nella Larsen's distinctive and revealing novel about racial identity set in New York in 1929. Now a major motion picture starring Tessa Thompson, Ruth Negga and Alexander Skarsgård.

Irene Redfield, married to a successful physician, enjoys a comfortable life in Harlem, New York. Reluctantly, she renews her friendship with old school friend, Clare Kendry. Clare, who like Irene is light skinned, 'passes' as white and is married to a racist white man who has no idea about Clare's racial heritage. Even though Irene knows that reigniting her friendship with Clare will lead to trouble, she can't resist allowing Clare into her world. Clare in turn wants to rekindle her bonds with the African American community of her youth. As tensions mount between friends and between couples, this taut and mesmerizing narrative spins towards an unexpected end.

Part of the Macmillan Collector's Library; a series of stunning, clothbound, pocket sized classics with gold foiled edges and ribbon markers. These beautiful books make perfect gifts or a treat for any book lover. This edition of *Passing* features an introduction by writer and academic, Christa Holm Vogelius.

About the Author

Nella Larsen was born in Chicago in 1891 to a white Danish mother and a black West Indian father. She studied in America and Denmark and throughout her writing career she worked as a children's librarian and primarily as a nurse. In 1928 her first novel *Quicksand* was published to great critical acclaim. *Passing* was published a year later. Her marriage to Dr Elmer Imes brought her into contact with the upper echelons of New York's black society and she became an important female voice of the Harlem Renaissance. She was the first black woman to receive a Guggenheim Fellowship for creative writing. Divorced in 1933, she spent the rest of her life working as nurse. Nella Larsen died in 1964.



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Passing Book Club Discussion Points

- Why do you think Clare decides to pass as white? Why do you think Irene doesn't decide to pass? If you were in their position what would you do? Why?
- How are the themes of *Passing* relevant to current events and American life? Do you think Clare would try to pass as white today? Why or why not?
- Which character do you relate to more—Irene or Clare? Why?
- Why do you think Nella Larsen choose to tell *Passing* from Irene's point of view? How would the story be different if it was told by Clare?
- Why do you think the truth about Clare and Brian is never revealed? What do you think their relationship really is?
- How would you describe John Bellew? Why do you think Clare married him?
- What does Clare gain by passing as white? What does she give up?
- What are Clare's views on race? What are Irene's? How are they the same? How and why are they different?
- Explain three ways race is explored in *Passing*. How might this book be different if Nella Larsen wrote it today? In what ways might it be the same?
- Throughout the book, the metaphor of "passing" takes on several meanings. What are these meanings and how do they relate to each other?
- Why do you think Nella Larsen chose to write such a vague ending? Does it change your opinion of any of the characters or any other elements of the story? Why or why not?
- Who do you think is ultimately responsible for Clare's death? Why?
- *Passing* is primarily set in Harlem during the 1920's. In what ways is life in big American cities the same as it was portrayed in *Passing*. How has it changed?
- Almost 100 years after its publication, *Passing* is now a major motion picture. Do you think it will make a good movie? Why or why not? Why do you think it took so long for this book to be adapted into a film?

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