The Big Read Helps American Studies Students Discover
Zora Neale Hurston’s Multi-Disciplinary Approach to Ethnography and Fiction
in *Their Eyes are Watching God*, Hurston’s Local Connection to St. Simons Island,
and the Golden Isles’ Ongoing Cultural Preservation Work
Spring 2015
Students in Dr. Wurz’s AMST 3700
Principles and Methods of American Studies

**Reciprocity:**
We offer our oral presentation and posters as support of the Golden Isles Arts and Humanities Association’s 2015 Big Read discussion of Hurston’s *Their Eyes Were Watching God*. Through our contribution to the Big Read discussion, the class invites our community to support local cultural preservation efforts.

**A Guiding Principle:**
In *Why Cultural Studies?*, (2015) Gilbert B. Rodman asserts, “If your politics tell you the answer to your research questions before you have even begun the intellectual work of your project, then (again) you are not doing cultural studies” (40).

**Research and Discussion Questions:**
- Was the NEA’s Reading at Risk: A Survey of Literary Reading in America (2004) and the creation of the Big Read Initiative in response to the report’s findings an example of “cultural studies”?
- How did Zora Neale Hurston apply the skills she learned in college in ways that exceeded the expectations of Franz Boas (the father of modern anthropology and her professor at Barnard College); how did Hurston shape (and become shaped by) social hierarchies and social formations?
- Are Hurston’s methods for research and writing “cultural studies” according to historical and contemporary American Studies scholars’ definitions?
- What “difficult, politically-charged terrain […] along the unstable fault lines of the culture” (Rodman 29-30) did Zora Neale Hurston traverse in her research and writing?
- Ninety years after 1925, when Hurston, Alan Lomax, and Mary E. Barnicle conducted ethnography interviews on St. Simons Island, what is the status of Gullah-Geechee cultural preservation work on SSI and in the Golden Isles?
- How can community members support local cultural preservation efforts?